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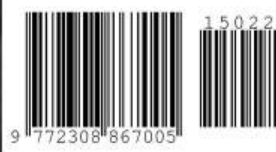
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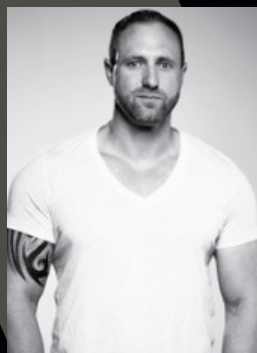
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THE GONE ISSUE

by DIRK STEENEKAMP

What's the earliest memory that you have of a family holiday, or any holiday for that matter? I quite clearly remember Durban's North Coast as the place to be. From a very young age, we used to stay at unit 1202 of the Durban Sands annually, overlooking Addington Hospital on the one side, and the Big Wheel on the other. My older brother taught me how to bowl that inswinger with a tennis ball, and that was way beyond its own life cycle. Fun was had. Overly protective mothers would lather us in SPF10 000, as we ran around, diving into the "shoe pool," while the dads played some putt-putt and braai'd up a storm. A simpler time? Yes. Well, look, if nostalgia to a simpler place is your kind of thing, we have just the answer for you. Open up page 66, and see our experience of a modern-day-totally-grown-up simpler time. All actors believe that they can play any role from any script, that's essentially the definition of the job. But few really nail it as perfectly as Johnny Depp does. Over the years, we've seen him as Willy Wonka, Jack Sparrow, and now, we see him as Whitey Bulger in *Black Mass*. Critics are calling it not only his best movie in years, but the biggest performance of his career. We also bring you a special report on the American who's had enough and is taking on ISIS, a gripping story from page 88.

Enjoy this issue and living #ThisMaximLife



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by ANDREW
BRAUTESETH

Wanderlust bites hard. It's like an infection, and the only way to scratch it is to book a flight. I'm mentally mood-boarding a week in Istanbul, or a surf road trip through Southern California. I'm having visions of New York, craving that chemical roundhouse kick of anticipation and excitement.

Travel gives me that edge-of-a-tall-building vertigo, as I'm uprooted from my daily routine and released from a perceptual rut. Taking a jump into a new place, a way to rearrange the mental chessboard. As a photographer, travel is wrapped up in the job description. A lens a licence. A visa stamped, with special permission to wield a camera, the great experience-conversion machine, from the streets of Buenos Aires, to Midtown Manhattan. I'll find myself climbing over reefs in Bali's Uluwatu to capture venturing surfers, and snap locals over cigarettes and coffee in downtown Cairo. Baking raw experience into edible frames of memory. To those who have a hammer, everything looks like a nail. To those with a camera, everything looks like a frame. It's human to create order out of chaos, and I'm driven into the unknown to arrange life into crops of 35mm.

Travel is an elixir, but it also has its frustrations. Flying turns people into hustling animals in pushing queues. They don't call it "cattle class" for nothing. Screaming babies for 15 hours on a long haul, and then you find yourself without cash on a remote Indonesian island. Travelling on a notorious "Green Mamba," the South African passport, is going into the game with a handicap.

The instantaneousness of modern travel has given rise to a foodie equivalent of sightseeing, the "travellie". A travellie eats up experiences without fully tasting and digesting. They don't allow the process of travel to fill their appetite, but gobble up places on their bucket list. Turkish Airlines advertises an app where international cities are a thumb-click away. Like ordering a pizza.

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ANDREW OF
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SCOTCH WITH
THEIR TURN UP.

ANDREW: I've always enjoyed those moments of a well-deserved drink, and craft beer is at the top of that list. I actually went through a 2-year period where I detested the thought of beer, and opted for hard liquor mixes instead. But after a while, that becomes a bit too much. My love of a good beer really came back with the introduction of German and Belgian brews, mainly the Witbier and Weissbier styles. So, these days, after a long and hot day, there are a few things more enjoyable than chilling back with good company, and knocking back a few brews! That being said, I'm a fan of a good Scotch, too. But catch me at a random time for a drink, and I'll most probably go for a Hefeweizen or something similar. And I'm also all about a good Mexican ale, like Corona and lime.

BRIAN: When it comes to a good drink that plays a part in my life, I'd have to go with a glass of Glenlivet Scotch over some ice. I'm not a huge drinker, but when I do, I like to have something that I can really taste and appreciate, and Glenlivet really does that for me. A glass always reminds me of days that were quite hectic, but then I could pour a Scotch, put everything into perspective, and figure out how I want to move forward. And apart from that, there's nothing like having some good Scotch with good friends, and making memories. So, if you're feeling like you need to let go a little bit, or sip something good with good people, I highly recommend some good ol' Scotch.

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WANDERLUST

AN ACCLAIMED TRAVEL WRITER ON WHY SOLO JOURNEYS MIGHT JUST BE THE ULTIMATE APHRODISIAC.

by LAWRENCE OSBORNE

OVER

THE CENTURIES, travel has become one of the world's largest industries. But until the '60s, this strange form of human behaviour was always shrouded in an atmosphere of high culture and moral improvement; its real motives were hushed up. English novelist E.M. Forster suggested, in his early novels about travellers in Italy, that frustrated, repressed upper-class English people really went to Italy not to examine churches and relics, but to find love and sex. "One doesn't come to Italy for niceness," one of his characters admits, "One comes for life." A polite euphemism for getting laid.

Freud was of the opinion that sex and railway travel always went together. But the same could be said for any form of whimsical wandering. The Grand Tour, in the 18th century, was supposed to be a way for young aristocrats to improve their minds through visits to Roman ruins. In reality, it was a nonstop debauch. They went to Venice for both the Tintoretos and the courtesans, but they certainly preferred the courtesans.

Two hundred years on, I suspect that we travel for very similar reasons, though we almost never admit it. The wandering traveller is more open to random experiences than his more structured home life could ever permit. As the hotel room, and bar, and the streets of a foreign city replace his own home and his tediously overfamiliar haunts, his mind starts to open up to the unexpected.

"Walking is a virtue," Bruce Chatwin once said, while, "Tourism is a deadly sin." And indeed, the solitary explorer in foreign parts is nearly always in an unconscious position to stumble upon the erotically unknown, provided that he gets out of the car, or the train, or, God forbid, the tour bus, and makes his way on foot.

Each continent is different. In North America, the traveller gravitates to the hotel bar, where he finds a variety of fellow transients looking for connections. In tropical Asia, where I live, the street itself is the conduit, with the restaurants of Bangkok, say, so crowded together as to make flirtations almost inevitable. In Europe, it is parks and museums, though who could resist a hopeful spin at the bar of the Savoy in

Rome, or the more secretive watering hole in Istanbul's Ciragan Palace Kempinski?

The easiest achievement is the ad hoc hookup with a fellow traveller, since, like you, she is likely to be unmoored and open to novelty. Our guards are down all the way. I once hit it off with a German woman in a laundromat in Tokyo, while we were doing our backpacker detergent duty. We seemed to be the only Westerners in the neighbourhood where we were staying, and this enormous fact had a kind of erotic allure to it. But why? I wondered to myself at the time if I would have found her attractive had I met her where I live. "Probably not," I admitted, but the sentiment was priggish and irrelevant. Place and time are everything in human life. She wrote to me for years before finally admitting coyly that she had been happily married while travelling in Tokyo. Fair enough. All bets are off when you're several thousand kilometres from home, trying on a new self is part of the fun of escaping, wandering away from a cultural context that circumscribes everything you feel and do. On the road, you are not expected to behave in any particular way, other than not murdering or abusing people.

On the other hand, of course, there is the equivalent allure of mutual incomprehension with a local. Once, I hired a motorbike in Battambang in Cambodia for a few days in hopes of "seeing the town". One night, I noticed that someone was following me on a bike of her own. She eventually caught up to me, and asked me if I would take her to dinner. We ended up kissing and then sleeping on a boat in a river, but no sex. It went on for two weeks, and the same rule held, yet I never got tired of it. It was a motorbike fling with a cultural context that was completely beyond me, and in the end, I found that the nonsex was more erotic and mysterious than the sex would have been. There is something curiously liberating about sharing intimacy with someone whose language you cannot speak. Sharing only a few words can sometimes get you to the point much quicker. The spaces between them fill up very quickly.

Most travel is uneventful, or worse.

Trains are late, baggage breaks the back, money seeps uncontrollably, and mere places frequently disappoint. At the back of your mind, however, there is often a thought of which you are partially ashamed. And at the end of the day, there is always an hour or two when, alone, you can slip like a slick thief to the bar of a nice hotel, order yourself a gin and tonic, and disappear into the rarefied atmosphere of eternal hope and lechery that a simple hotel bar can confer. You'll probably stagger upstairs alone at midnight, with the flat screen for company. But every once in a while, if you're lucky, the gods will smile and remind you that you are not entirely dead, or even domesticated. ■

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LIBERATING
ABOUT
SHARING
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WHOSE
LANGUAGE
YOU CANNOT
SPEAK.**

wish you were here

WHO IS APPLEBY?

THE UNDERGROUND R&B SENSATION IS POISED TO BREAKOUT, WITHOUT EVEN LETTING THE WORLD SEE HIS FACE.

by DAN HYMAN

APPLEBY'S VISAGE IS ROUND, even cherubic. His eyes widen, and he'll flash a fluorescent smile every time he gets excited about a topic of discussion. Which is often. But you'll have to take my word for it, at least for now. The 23-year-old singer-rapper, who has drawn comparisons to the Weeknd, both for his velvety voice and the mystery he cultivates, refuses to be photographed. In fact, he has so far managed to keep his true identity a complete secret.

In pictures, Appleby's face is obscured, tucked underneath an overcoat. But right now, at a studio we're at, he's completely present, every garrulous, goofy inch of him. "Yo! How's it going, my man?" Appleby bellows, all wide-toothed smile and chirpy, come-here-bro charm, wrapping me in a hug.

He bounds about the studio, back and forth between the recording booth and the control board, where a dreadlocked engineer puffs a marijuana pipe. As to why he won't reveal himself to his growing fan base? "For me, it's just plain fun," he says, "It's my way of allowing people to interpret the art first, and formulate their own opinions about me before seeing me."

Now going by his mother's maiden name (his real first name is Justin), Appleby has been recording music for only 11 months. A few months ago, days after he uploaded the track "Spit on Me" to his Soundcloud account, his murky, genre-bending brand of after-hours R&B received raves on the Source, Pigeons and Planes, and other influential music sites. Soon, Appleby was signed by a talent manager, and he found himself in front of hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons for an impromptu desk-side performance.

"I'm smelling roses on the go," Appleby says of the whirlwind ascent that now has major labels itching for his signature, "To have generated this much interest without a hit song is just awesome." Despite such rapid-fire success, Appleby remains hidden in plain sight. Save for his mother, he says none of his friends or family are aware he's even making music. When not at the studio, Appleby manages a store in a suburban mall. "It's a completely separate world," he says, comparing his dull home life to the surreal professional one that recently whisked him to London and Paris for meetings with producers, fellow artists, and labels.

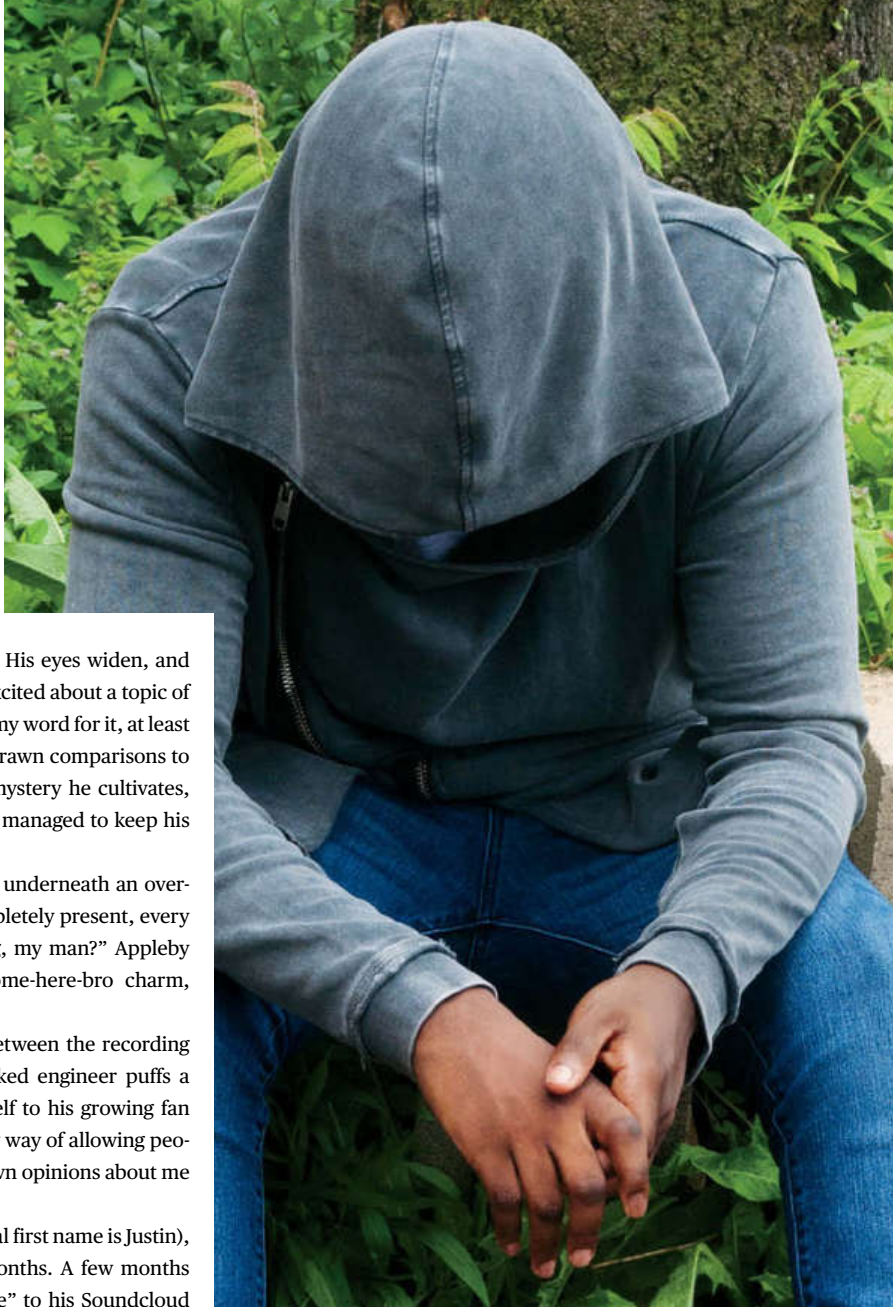
"I don't talk about music at home," he says, "Nobody around me is really interested. There's something cool about having a secret." Leading a double life is nothing new for Appleby. As a child tennis prodigy, the son of separated parents spent much of the year at a posh tennis academy. During the holidays, he'd retreat to Cleveland, USA, to spend

time with his alcoholic father, that is, when his old man wasn't disappearing. "There were days when I would find him in the alley, and I would have to bring him back home," Appleby says of his dad, who he hasn't spoken to since age 17, "Or I would go to a drug house, and you'd get through all the crackheads, and find your father in the corner."

After quitting tennis at 17, he returned home and slid into a 6-year depression. "Then music came along," he says, "And it gave me a reason to wake up every day."

Appleby started recording, and quickly immersed himself in the studio's culture. "It's like going to school every day just to see your friends," he says of the spot that's hosted fellow hip-hop elites Chance the Rapper, Vic Mensa, and Tink. While finishing his album, "Mask & Lies," set to drop by the end of the year, Appleby is also preparing for his live debut. He sharpens his skills by performing incognito at local karaoke bars, singing classic Michael Jackson songs.

Appleby remains unsure how his life could change if he reveals his true identity. He can only tilt his head back and smile at the thought of being completely exposed, "I think people will probably just be like, 'Ah, so there he is.'" ■



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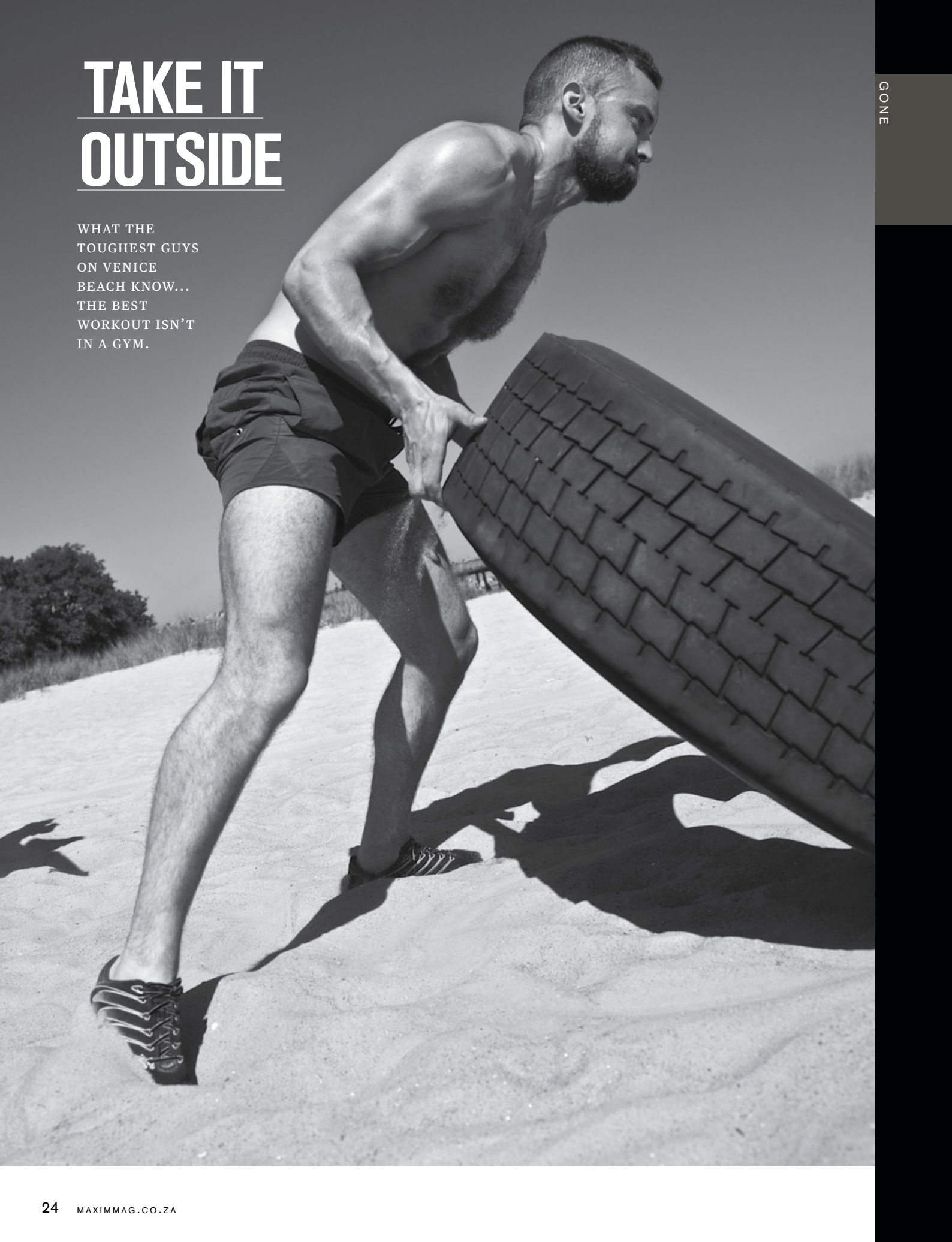


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THERE'S THIS WORD that enlightened fitness buffs love... functional. Strapping your hands to a 180-kilogram barbell and hoisting that bastard over your head? That's not functional; that's just training a set of muscles to do a certain motion over and over again. "If you fall from a tree, and you need to grab a branch with one hand, and you were using straps at a gym? Well, your grip isn't going to be that great, and you will fall," Paul Duke says.

Duke will not fall, though. Duke can grab that branch with one hand and dangle like the world's beefiest monkey. He can do this, because his grip is crushing. Because he and his workout partner, Jacob Peacock, exercise in an actual tree. Because that is functional.

Along U.S.' Venice Beach, Duke and Peacock are men apart. They're a daily spectacle known to all as the Viking Brothers. It's impossible to miss them. They are actors who met at a gym two years ago, and discovered a shared passion for insane goals, stuff like mastering the one-armed handstand push-up, which is exactly as preposterous as it sounds. And to reach these goals, they started insane outdoor workouts. The Viking Brothers venture out with nothing more than a rope, and turn the world into a challenge course, throwing stones, dragging logs through



"WE PUSH EACH OTHER," SAYS PEACOCK, "ONE WILL WANT TO GIVE UP, AND THE OTHER WILL YELL, 'HOLD! HOLD! HOLD!'"

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mud, doing pull-ups on one tree branch, and then jumping to another. They welcome anyone who dares to join. Few can keep up.

The guys have a motto, "CrossFit is for pussies." But what they really hate is gym equipment and shortcuts to flashy muscles. Real strength requires real work in the real world, it's in the grip and the glutes, and the little muscles that never bulge. Even their signature look, the big beards, was grown for a practical purpose. There's work out there for rugged actors who look like they could be on *Game of Thrones*.

"We don't need to look pretty," Duke says, "Sometimes, we go to the gym, and I don't comb the beard properly. It doesn't matter. Sometimes, there's food in it. It doesn't matter". "Even so, we're still getting stares from the ladies," Peacock says. "Oh, yeah!" Duke says, "I gotta say, we're getting much more attention from the ladies now, because they crave that masculinity. They can see, 'Wow, those guys are *real* men. Look what they can do.'"

Both are married. And both wives, truth be told, want the beards shaved. But that just wouldn't be functional. — JASON FEIFER





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SUMMER FIT

USN'S GARETH POWELL GIVES US SIMPLE TIPS TO HELP YOU GET BACK INTO SHAPE FOR THE SUMMER.

GLUTTONY TOOK OVER many of us during winter, as we scoffed down on unhealthy food, ignoring the consequences. And now, the sins of winter are being brought to the light, as summer has dawned, and the condemnation has started from the really gorgeous girls at the beach who keep asking you to take a photo of them with some guy with a six-pack, and a rock-solid jaw. But do not dive into a gloomy, black hole filled with Cheese Puffs and *Star Wars* box sets just yet, because Gareth Powell, the national marketing coordinator at USN, has got a few tips for you to get you back in shape for this summer. "Whether you're just now deciding to take on a healthy lifestyle to surprise everyone around you come summer time, or whether you want to get back into your fitness routine after a 'winter break', preparing your body for summer is a far less daunting task if a practical plan for exercise and diet is put into place," says Powell.

POWELL SUGGESTS THE FOLLOWING SIMPLE TIPS TO HELP YOU GET BACK INTO SHAPE: Plan your meals. Not planning your daily meals is arguably one of the easiest ways to sabotage your attempts at a healthy lifestyle, often leading to settling for unhealthy alternatives. Make sure that meals are always planned ahead of time to give you enough time to prepare. Make sure that you include a mixture of carbohydrates, fruits, vegetables, and protein in your diet. Your nutritional intake can also be balanced out with your supplementation intake, having a healthy, low-calorie shake as a snack, while sticking to a well-rounded breakfast and lunch meal. Explore alternative and new options. If you are attempting to get back into a routine, it may be a good idea to try new ways of training and eating. Adding new and interesting meals and regimes to your healthy lifestyle will help keep you motivated and prevent boredom. Try an outdoor, scenic run instead of the treadmill, or participate in one of our many organised events.

FIND A WORKOUT BUDDY: In the beginning of a training regime, keeping positive can be one of the hardest parts. Training with someone close to you like a friend, colleague, or family member makes it easier to keep on track, as it can help turn the exercise experience into fun quality time. Keep a food journal. Keeping track of what you consume on a daily basis will give you an understanding of why progress may or may not have been made. Track everything, from snacks to main meals, and use this information to analyse your fitness results. Make attainable, small changes to your lifestyle rather than setting goals that can seem daunting and impossible to reach. These changes could be really basic, such as excluding soft drinks from your diet or adding in more fibre, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

WORKOUT FROM HOME TO START OFF WITH: Many of us avoid leaving the comfort of our homes for the gym. There are a variety of exercises that you can do from home that can help you stay fit until you are ready to enter the public gym space. Jogging, push-ups, and crunches, leg presses and skipping, these are simple and easy ways to workout in the comfort of your own home. "Although it can be challenging to adjust to a healthier lifestyle, if the correct diet and exercise principles are applied, getting your body ready in time for summer will not only be a fun process, but also a lasting one." Powell. ■

THE NEW HEAD TRIP

VIRTUAL-REALITY
TRAVEL MIGHT JUST
REVOLUTIONISE
TOURISM, WHILE
TURNING US
ALL INTO SHUT-INS.

by KYLE CHAYKA

"YOU MIGHT WANT TO SIT DOWN," Mike Woods tells me. I recline in an office chair, and a moment later, after whizzing through a space-time tunnel that looks like a tornado made of pure light, I find myself standing on a beach in Hawaii, USA. The colours are vivid and rich, the sunlight dappled. The sound of waves echoes in my ears, palms sway in the wind, and the wide ocean sparkles to the horizon. I am alone.

I feel an immediate sense of calm. It's uncanny, but I would swear my skin is growing warm in the sunlight, and a faint breeze is carrying a mist off the water. My heartbeat begins to slow. But as I crane my neck to check the trees for coconuts, the landscape becomes pixelated. It's kind of like being on *Matrix* in *World of Warcraft*.

I'm immersed in a virtual-reality experience, aptly called the Teleporter, created by British digital media studio Framestore. The Hawaiian expedition, along with a virtual journey to the top of a London skyscraper, was designed for Marriott Hotels as a way for its guests to experience the future of travel. Woods, the founder of Framestore's digital department, helps me off with my headset, an Oculus VR Rift. It's then that I realise that the "ocean spray" was actually just beads of sweat that collected on my forehead around the edges of the bulky goggles.

"It's as close as you can get to a real-life experience," Woods tells me. All those former travel agents who lost their jobs because of the digital revolution haven't seen anything yet. VR companies are working feverishly to enable





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would-be adventurers to travel the globe from the comfort of their own futons. Want to scale a digital replica of the Great Wall of China? Paddle down the Amazon? Just “jack in,” as Ralph Fiennes put it in *Strange Days*. “People in the next few years will have a separate room in their house that’s just full of stuff like this,” Woods claims, “If you want to go and hang out at the top of the Eiffel Tower, or go to a mountain in Iceland, you can.”

It will be cheap, safe, and completely hassle-free. “Think of all the trauma involved in travel, the fossil fuels it spends, the germs you get on a plane, the money it costs, the amount of time it takes,” says Jeremy Bailenson, the founding director of renowned Stanford University’s Virtual Human Interaction Lab, “VR allows you to travel when you want to, not when you have to.” Forget jet lag, lost luggage, bewildering menus, lumpy mattresses, and predatory locals, all of which make actual travel such a drag. The Oculus Rift never runs out of space in the overhead bins.

This is how tech people tend to talk, with total confidence that every new tool is going to radically change everything. Remember life before the Segway forever changed transportation, or TaskRabbit forever changed commerce? Exactly. And yet research suggests that virtual travel does offer some of the salutary mental effects of the real thing. A recent study conducted by a university found that 40-second-long “micro-breaks” spent viewing a virtual simulation of nature increased workers’ ability to focus on the tasks at hand. The suits in HR are already asking themselves, “Do people even need holiday days?”

BY NOW WE’RE ALL familiar with Oculus Rift. In 2012, 19-year-old Palmer Luckey developed a cheap VR helmet that attracted the interest of his professors. He then launched a Kickstarter, and raised more than R31 million. Last year, after delivering early models, Luckey sold the company to Facebook for over R25 billion. Meanwhile, numerous other VR companies are racing ahead with similar technology, as tech bloggers and other early users rave about the experience.

Scott Broock is the vice president of content at Jaunt, a US-based VR company. When I meet Broock in a bar, he’s dressed in a soft blazer, crisp shirt, and designer glasses. Broock puts an Oculus Rift on my head, and suddenly I’m standing in a grungy alleyway covered in graffiti. An alien zooms into my field of vision, and starts playing DJ on a pair of intergalactic turntables. A great VR experience “lets you feel like you’ve escaped,” Broock tells me. Marriott is considering incorporating VR into its hotel rooms, the better to advertise its other properties and let guests “sample destinations before they go,” says Michael Dail, the company’s VP of marketing. “We’re rethinking in-room entertainment.”

It would be like movie trailers, but for destinations. Before you go outside to see San Francisco in the flesh, first take a peek at what you could be doing in Istanbul! But would it increase sales? Here’s what would, hoteliers pumping adult pay-per-view into Oculus. Guests would never go home.

**“IF YOU WANT
TO GO AND
HANG OUT AT
THE TOP OF THE
EIFFEL TOWER
OR GO TO A
MOUNTAIN
IN ICELAND,
YOU CAN.”**

AS FOR THE PROSPECT of virtual travel, my whirlwind tour of pixelated destinations leaves me pining for the glorious inconvenience of a delayed flight, or a malfunctioning hotel heater. No matter how seamless the 3D scanning, a virtual holiday will never manage to replicate the greatest thing about going somewhere... serendipity.

On a virtual holiday, every step is bitmapped. The programmer is your tour guide, and you can never stray from the group. “You can’t say you discovered this tiny, little restaurant, met these amazing people on the street, or saw an impromptu concert,” says Sean Murphy, the editor in chief of Jetsetter, a travel Web site. For all its bells and whistles, VR is more like a postcard than a journey. It flattens what should be a multisensory voyage into a shallow facsimile, a nifty development for marketers, but hardly the Holodeck from *Star Trek*. “I don’t see it as a replacement; I see it as a way to inspire people to travel more,” says Albert “Skip” Rizzo, a psychologist who launched a VR lab in 1996, “People are always going to go in the flesh. You don’t have the feel of the sand, the sun shining on you, all those tactile senses.” But companies will sure try. They’re already hard at work on making VR more tactile. Marriott’s Teleporter originally simulated ocean mist with a spray bottle.

The best VR trip on my grand tour takes place at Specular, an underground studio where I visit “Exquisite City,” a surreal version of Belgrade that mixes 3D scans of the actual place with elements that conjure up a drugged-out *Minecraft* mod. When James George, the cocreator of the piece, fits the Oculus over my head, I find myself in a nighttime urban landscape, where stars shine like pixels in the dark sky above me. Or is it the other way around and the pixels are stars?

Navigating the terrain with the help of a keyboard, I come across buildings made entirely of ATMs, a skyscraper tower built from freestanding stairs, and trees growing upside down. “You’re an anthropologist on an alien planet,” George tells me. The experience is deeply unsettling, but I can’t get enough of it. The whole notion that VR travel should mimic the real thing suddenly seems mistaken. The unknowns are what make travel great. It’s not standing in front of the Eiffel Tower, and taking a snapshot. It’s chatting up a hot art student who invites you to a house party in a sketchy arrondissement, and waking up wondering what happened to your pants. The further away you get from your own everyday reality, the easier it is to feel like you’ve really gone somewhere, and found a piece of yourself you never knew.

So, if you’re one of those early adopters who can’t wait to relax on a virtual beach, go right ahead. It just means more space on the sand for those of us who prefer the real thing. ■



V



U

VOLVO'S SUB
ZERO XC90
HAS THAWED
TO COMPLETION
WITH SUCH
AN ICY-SUAVE
EXTERIOR,
YOU'D EXPECT
TO FIND A
WELROD PISTOL
IN THE GLOVE
COMPARTMENT.

by John Page

BUILDING REALLY SAFE CARS is what cemented Volvo's reputation, and mitigated those robust, 90-deg jagged edges. But unless you've had an airbag stop your face from rebounding off of the dashboard, safety ranks in pretty low. You're going to care more about the number of USB ports than the airbag count.

This is why Volvo has teamed up with Avicii. For starters, they're both Swedish, and Avicii's music library is proliferated by digital technology, just like the XC90's cabin. For the rest, they're just two brands wanting to redefine a genre. A warning for an upcoming bad pun; Volvo saw the DJ icon as a way of crowd-surfing to the next "level".

A thinly veiled estate that redeems bad life choices, this is not! Volvo refers to the T-shaped lights as "Thor's Hammer," and the rest of the square gravitas gives another definition to the term "house". It has the oiled muscle needed to smash through the competition, and exquisite alloys in a 20-inch diameter.

And when the bass drops through the 19-speaker, Bowers & Wilkins system, the XC90 lofts its hands to the beat of efficiency and turbo power. Petrol or diesel, all engines are confined to 2.0 litres, a concern if you live in the capacity-conscious Middle East. But you'd never believe their size from the way they hustle the big Volvo along, through the smoothest eight gears in the business.

And the all-wheel drive is Scandinavian approved, able to plough its way across all textures of snow, thanks to its new, frosted, lightweight materials, which skim 120kg off of the old, so that it transcends lakes layered with precariously thin ice. Should you want to conquer more South African terrain, the optional air suspension raises the height by 40mm.

Tablets will be at home when playing on Volvo's slick control system, which eliminates countless clutter in the process. Pinch and swipe through menus, and upload music through Apple's CarPlay or Android Auto before tethering through the on-board Wi-Fi. It's so much fun, you'll forget to watch the road, but the XC90 has that covered, maintaining speed and direction, watching out for pedestrians and doing what Volvo does best... be incredibly safe.

WO



XC90

ALFA ROMEO GIULIA

Only Alfa can sketch an outline on a napkin, knock tomato sauce over it, and toss it across the room into a bin for the entire world to start guessing in hushed, secretive tones. That's what they've been doing for the last decade, one or two being the exception progress to assembly, but usually only Italians take the bait. Now, however, the factory lights are flickering with activity over the next Giulia, and the involved synergies eclipse anything before it. Leveraging ties with Ferrari and Maserati is a wise place to converge, before making the package gel, and skimming the price under its own badge. Exquisite genes like these set the Giulia on a collision course with the established German sedans, but Alfa's pencils have remained deadly, with eccentric style arousing even the sceptics. They argue efficiency, and Alfa retorts with soul. Soul takes time. It's why Alfa delayed the project, engineered it back to rear-wheel drive, and initially rejected earlier drawings. A driver's weapon, fit for shredding the finest roads. A V6 Ferrari-developed heart could be in the pipelines, stoked up to battle the BMW M4 and C63 with a lot more panache, and a soundtrack that won't need to be polished with artificial noises. Do we know when it's coming? We would be silly to rush Alfa.

Alfa Romeo Giulia

Engine: 1.7-litre 4-cyl turbo

Power and Torque: 177kW/340Nm (estimation)

0-100km/h: 6.5 seconds (estimation)

Price: R550 000 (estimation)

Buy It For: Ferrari blood



RENAULT MEGANE



As far as car names go, not many come more star-studded than Trophy. Little surprise, this originates from a company that also refers to its most rigid chassis design as “Cup”. But the name has proved itself worthy, for this car once hoisted that Nurburgring trophy, a victory for the fastest front-wheel drive production car of its ilk. Cementing its name further is an entire race series called the Megane Trophy, and although the road car has been dialled back a few notches, it remains fierce in the right hands. Not overflowing with champagne, the interior has a more competitive RS Monitor. Drivers can record G-force, lap times, or log their best 0-100km/h times as quick evidence to quash a rival brand. The first model to deliver over 200kW, Trophy thrashes violently off of the line like few all-wheel-drive cars can, with that Akrapovic exhaust booming and crackling until all car alarms are flat. Brembo brakes, deep-bucket seats, and Alcantara remind you this is no 5-door family hatch, even if you do get useful gizmos like navigation. Buy one and Renault will show you how the Trophy got its name, by adding a track day and driver training as part of an inclusive deal.

Renault Megane Trophy

Engine: 2.0-litre 4-cyl turbo

Power and Torque: 201kW/360Nm

0-100km/h: 6.0 seconds

Price: R449 900

Buy It For: Akrapovic-inspired thunder



FORD FOCUS ST3

The cupholders in the Focus ST can safely holster extra-value, bonus-sized canisters of caffeine in luminous colours. The handbrake is Ken-Block approved, tensioned to mitigate against a wide turning circle, and the flared body panels provide enough surface to mount 360-deg GoPro angles. So, Velcro your high-tops, and head for abandoned shipping yards in another YouTube clip of slo-mo extreme angles, while pursued by the city’s entire law enforcement. While we wait for the ultimate Focus RS, or even the palpable Mustang, Ford has rearranged some of the ST’s suspension to keep its mainstream performance model on the cutting edge. In layman’s terms, it’s stiffer, steers sweeter, and is less likely to topple those orange cones in a slalom race. No power hike has occurred under the hood, but optional 19-inch wheels engrave their mark in blistering, acrid smoke trails, while control is unfiltered by the 6-speed, manual gearbox. This is back to basics! If none of this tempts little horns to protrude from your forehead, then the simplified cockpit on the ST3 nearly offers GTI innovation, and again, the Focus ST is something of a little bargain, coming with everything you want stuffed under one slim price.

Ford Focus ST3

Engine: 2.0-litre 4-cyl turbo

Power and Torque: 184kW/360Nm

0-100km/h: 6.5 seconds

Price: R421 900

Buy It For: Wild torque steer



TRAVEL

GONE

Tips and tricks to look your best when walking through the arrival gate.



FLYING

Ever wondered how Beckham or the West family look their best when they walk through arrival gates? Okay, yes, it's probably because they flew in their own private plane decked out with modern luxury. But, even then, travel can wreak havoc on your skin, hair, complexion, and body. Seasoned travellers have various tips and tricks to ensure they look the best they can when they arrive after a long-haul flight. It's all about understanding what is going to happen to you during the flight, and preparing for the pasty skin, puffy eyes, messy hair, and bad breath. Firstly, there is nothing natural about sitting in a chair for 8 hours, in a compressed cabin, where the air is rotated, and you are served copious amounts of liquids and snacks. Yes, there is nothing natural about flying, and the body knows this and certainly shows this. So, what happens to the body during a flight? Well, it all depends on the class that you are travelling in. The more space you have, the better your body will react. But, regardless of what class you are flying in, everyone is subjected to the same pressurisation and, to a degree, the same air. Aside from the more extreme cases, the most common effect is dehydration, and for some, sleep deprivation. It may seem like a contradiction, but the body may also experience increased fluid retention, and because of the air conditioning, the skin and hair may react to these extreme conditions. I use the term "extreme" simply because this environment is not the natural state of the body, and as a result, your body will show signs of distress.

PASTY SKIN

Cabin pressurisation, lack of mobility, resulting in poor circulation, and being in a constantly air-conditioned environment, especially for a long period of time, will result in the skin being compromised. Your skin may increase excretions to counter dehydration. The body may also begin to sweat, leading to a buildup of moisture. To stop this, take regular walks to keep the circulation going. A good intake of water is also advisable, ensuring the body is hydrated. To control the buildup of oil, use face wipes such as Dermalogica's Skin Purifying Wipes, or Garnier's Cleansing Towelettes.

LIFELESS HAIR

Similarly, sitting in an air-conditioned environment for an extended period of time also results in lifeless hair. Air cons extract the moisture in the air, drying out the hair, leaving it flat and unmanageable. There are a couple of things you can do here. Take a hat with you, apply a hair moisturiser before you get on the plane, such as the Moroccanoil Restorative Hair Mask, or use a hair mist, like L'Occitane's Conditioning Hair Mist, to revitalise the hair before landing. Alternatively, have a buzz cut before you fly, or tie it up in a topknot.

SWOLLEN FACE AND EYES

The combination of water retention and sleep deprivation will result in your face bloating a little, your eyes swelling, and dark circles forming around your eyes. This is possibly the most visual effect that flying has on you, which often results in travellers investing in a large pair of sunglasses. The face wipes, water intake, and regular walks will assist in minimising this, as well as a comfortable sleep. But this isn't always possible. So, give your face and eyes a little boost by using a revitalising skin moisturiser. There are some on the market that do a phenomenal job, such as L'Oreal's Men Expert Hydra-Energetic Boost Moisturiser Fluid. What's also great for combatting puffy eyes? ClarinsMen Anti-Fatigue Eye Serum. which calms the eye area and combats dark circles. — GREG FORBES

New
products
flying
off
the
shelves
this
September.

by Greg
Forbes

GOING, GOING, GONE!



1. Yves Saint Laurent Noble Leather

Travel to ancient cities with the new Splendid Wood range in the Oriental Collection by Yves Saint Laurent, and experience the depths of rare wood and fresh spice accords. Noble Leather in particular exudes confidence and strength, perfect for the Indiana-Jones-type guy.

Price: R2 900

Size: 80ml

Availability: Edgars



2. Viktor&Rolf Spicebomb Extreme

And just when you thought it couldn't get more intense, Viktor&Rolf make their iconic Spicebomb even more "extreme". Like its predecessor, the Spicebomb Extreme is still presented in the hand grenade-shaped flacon, promising an aromatic explosion of lavender, black pepper, tobacco, and vanilla.

Price: R1 395

Size: 90ml

Availability: Edgars



3. Hugo BOSS the Collection Velvet & Amber

BOSS the Collection brings us Velvet & Amber, a compelling scent which is sumptuous in character. Much like velvet, this distinguished new fragrance is rich and sensual. The fragrance opens up with an intensely warm amber top note, that combines with a sweet balsamic heart, all balanced by a creamy vanilla base note. The result is unapologetically extravagant, and completely addictive.

Price: R1 515

Size: 50ml

Availability:
Stuttafords



4. Dercos Neogenic Hair Rebirth Treatment

Hair going? End that journey with Vichy's Dercos Neogenic series. The range increases the overall density of your hair, making your hair look and feel thicker and fuller. The Hair Rebirth Treatment is particularly amazing, and, under controlled studies, it was found to increase the hair density on an average of 1 700 new hairs in 3 months.

Price: R1 200

Size: 28x6ml

Availability:
Dis-Chem



5. Kiehl's Daily Reviving Fluid

Kiehl's received high praises and a cult following with its Midnight Recovery Concentrate. Now, they are bringing in something to dominate the market during the day. Packed full of oils from ginger root, sunflowers, and tamanu, the fluid strengthens the skin's defences, keeping it youthful, bright, and fresh.

Price: R700

Size: 30ml

Availability: Kiehl's
stores



6. Azzaro Chrome Intense

A loved fragrance gets stronger, the Azzaro Chrome Intense. This one is a vibrant fragrance, comprising of woody and spicy base accords, promising an unforgettable and long-lasting addition to your travels.

Price: R995

Size: 100ml

Availability: Major
retailers

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happy ending

A sunny Sunday afternoon, a packed beach, excellent waves,
and the event webcast going live around the globe.
The finale begins, the world watches, and a great white
shark decides to become very famous.

by Craig Jarvis

For a little while, the J-Bay Open became the biggest story on the planet, pretty much trending on every single media platform in the world. Every TV station, radio station, newspaper, and website had it covered as well, all due to a 4-metre great white that came to visit. The fact that it came to visit during the event's finale, on a Sunday afternoon, in front of a packed beach, with hundreds of thousands of people watching on a webcast, just heightened the drama. The shark attack was probably one of the most well-covered pieces of news in the world, so, no need to re-visit it until the end. Before the shark came into town, there was a massive festival going on in Jeffreys Bay.

The J-Bay Winterfest presented by Woodlands Dairy is a sports and music festival that brings tourists and visitors to the town. It fills up hotels and restaurants, boosting all sorts of retail sales when things could seriously be slumping for this little surf town. The festival is anchored by the J-Bay Open, a huge surf contest that takes place at Supertubes, one of the best right-hand, point-break waves in the world. This event is stop 6 on the World Surf League's Championship Tour. This is the tour that's given American surfer Kelly Slater 11 world titles, where Durban surf hero Jordy Smith competes.

The J-Bay Open 2015 started off with a solid push of waves that saw the world's best surfers going hard to get those valuable points and prize money. The World Surf League had been absent from J-Bay for a few years, making a return last year, coming back in 2015 much to the competing surfers' delight. "J-Bay is one of the best stops in the world," said former event champion and one of the top competitors in the world, Australia's Taj Burrow, "It should be on the tour every year, and never go off again."

South Africa's Jordy Smith has won the event twice, and is also emphatic about the value of the event. "To take off on a solid wave at Supertubes, at low tide, with the wind howling offshore, is an incredible experience," Smith said, "To have that happen in a contest situation, with the local fans cheering and screaming from the beach, adds a whole new dimension to that experience. It's one of the best events on tour for me."

Despite the fact that Jordy is one of the best surfers out there on any given day, and is, as mentioned, a two-time champion, this year was not going to be his. After suffering from a back injury, Jordy was not able to surf at his best, bowing out of the contest early.

In fact, all three South African surfers in the event bowed out early. Durban's Slade Prestwich had won the JBU Supertrial presented by RVCA event, also held at Supertubes earlier in the month, and his first-place prize was a slot in the main event. He lost in round 2 to Brazil's Adriano de Souza. Mikey February, from Cape Town, had placed second in the Supertrial event, and was given a last-minute slot in the event due to a late injury withdrawal from tour rookie Matt Banting. He lost to the dynamic Filipe Toledo, also from Brazil. Jordy, who was clearly suffering from an injury, went down to Adam Melling from Australia. It would have been a sweet victory for Melling, as he was the surfer that Jordy defeated in 2010's final in order to get his J-Bay victory. While all the surfing was going on, there was a selection of other events going down at the J-Bay Winterfest. Other highlights included the Oakley X-Over event, a celebrity-filled crossover challenge in which the athletes had a chance to compete in a mountain bike race, a golf tournament, and a surf event. This event was eventually won by Plettenberg Bay's wild card Wihann Kotze,

last year's winner Butch James, Greg Minnaar, and John Smit. Garreth "Soldierboy" McLellan was another competitor in the Oakley X-Over, also crowning it as one of his favourite events of the year.

The Winter Music Festival was another attraction, with the likes of Matthew Mole and Jack Parow performing live for the massive crowds. The Billabong Junior Series presented by BOS was a great addition to this year's Winter Music Festival, opening up Magnatubes as another surf venue. Bolstered by a number of top, international junior surfers, this 4-day event brought the best junior surfers into the country to strut their stuff.

Another great event was the J-Bay MTB (Mountain Bike) Open presented by Jeffreys Bay Wind Farm, the only mountain bike event on the continent that traverses a wind farm. During the middle part of the 11-day waiting period for the J-Bay Open, the waves started getting really scarce, and the forecast for the last few days of the period was looking bleak. The contest organisers surfed a few heats and rounds in what could only be described as average conditions. But they persevered, and by the time the final day came, there were only a few heats to surf. Along with this came a fresh and clean southwest swell to greet all of the final competitors on that cold, July morning.

Many people arrived to watch the Kelly Slater vs. Mick Fanning semi-final, knowing that the surfer winning this heat would probably go on to win the event. Between them, the two surfers have 14 world titles under their belts, and they got those titles with incredible surfing, contest savvy, and dogged determination. No one was going to take any sides, and it was going to be a battle to the finish. Kelly Slater is very popular in South Africa, with a large group of fans in the country. On top of this, there have been rumours that the best competitive surfer in the world might be retiring from the tour next year. This meant that this could be the last time he'd be surfing in a professional event in J-Bay. The spectators swarmed onto the beach. Fanning, from Australia's Gold Coast, is also popular, and this resulted in the fans being divided on who they wanted to win. At the end of the heat, Kelly was left needing a final good wave and a score of 8.71. The final hooter went, and then the wave came through, an unlucky finish for the champ. In the second semi-final, it was an all-Australian affair, but with a twist. Julian Wilson surfs with his face to the wave at J-Bay (natural-footed, left foot forward), while Adrian Buchan surfs with his back to the wave (goofy-footed, right foot forward). It was victory for the natural-footer, with Wilson coming out on top.

The final, as we all know, was a short-lived affair. Julian Wilson got the first wave and was awarded a 6.67 score for it. It was the only wave ridden in the final, as the next minute after his ride led to Mick Fanning and the great white encounter. After the fact, when all had somewhat calmed down on the beach, the World Surf League made a very calm decision to give both the surfers second-place points and prize money. Both Fanning and Wilson were happy with this, and both walked away with a good result. The emotions, however, stuck around for a few weeks, with the YouTube video of the attack sitting at close to 22 million views.

In a statement from the World Surf League, it was announced that they would continue to respect the situation with regards to sharks and the shark environment, and do extensive research on better shark monitoring systems. The J-Bay Open was the first surf event televised live that had a serious shark encounter. To top all of this, it had a happy ending, and everyone loves happy endings.

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Molly Morrison

Photography by Tatiana Gerusova

Pinup model Molly Morrison's nostalgically knee-weakening looks would threaten even Marilyn Monroe, but she's much more interested in letting us know that there's more to her than a charming smile and bedroom baby blues we can't help but lay our eyes on.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO MODELLING? Well, when I was younger I had a very different body type. I was tall and very thin. While shopping in a mall at 15, I was spotted by an agent. From there, I did some runway work, modelled for jean companies, and balanced school with modelling on the side. In college, my more "hourglass" figure started to take form. Then, it was more of a natural transition into glamour and pinup modelling, and I had the chance to live out my love for vintage fashion. **WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING SHOOT YOU'VE HAD TO DO?** I guess I would have to say my first shoot ever was the most challenging. It was a test shoot for my agency at the time. I was lanky, very, very shy, and unsure of myself and how to move in front of the camera. During that age, I barely knew how to move and live inside my body, much less how to be under the pressure of people's critiquing eyes. But, it was seen as a success by the agency, and I started to learn more about my unique angles while

studying the pages of *Vogue*. Modelling became a way of expressing my love for fashion and art. I am not a supermodel, but it has been a learning experience for me. **DUE TO AGE, MODELLING CAREERS, LIKE SPORTS CAREERS, ARE VERY SHORT. A LOT OF MODELS RETIRE BY THE AVERAGE AGE OF 28. WHY IS THIS?** This could be for a variety of reasons. Maybe, models reach a point where they feel burnt out, and having to maintain a look may become difficult. Perhaps, they have other goals they wish to pursue. Or maybe, it has more to do with society's cultural history with youth, and models "age out" of the job. **HOW DO YOU PLAN ON GIVING YOUR CAREER, YOUR BRAND, LONGEVITY?** I have a clear line between hobbies, and my career. I see my modelling as an enjoyable hobby, a creative outlet, a growing and learning experience, and something to look back on, to be proud of as a woman when I have reached that "age limit," or when I have made that decision. **WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO FOR FUN?** I love to watch funny movies, be outdoors, and have fun with my friends and family.







D DO YOU PLAN ON VISITING SOUTH AFRICA? I would love to visit! I will, someday. **THERE ARE A LOT OF SCANDALS IN THE MODELLING INDUSTRY, LIKE HOLLYWOOD PHOTOGRAPHER TERRY RICHARDSON BEING ACCUSED OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY MODELS. DOES THAT HAPPEN OFTEN?** Personally, I can say that, no, I have never experienced anything questionable or uncomfortable. I think that if you listen to your intuition and stick to your morals, it's possible to avoid these situations. I feel for any girl who has been taken advantage of. I often work with very talented people that I consider friends. I have met some really cool people in the industry, and I am thankful for all of my wonderful modelling experiences. **AND THE BITCHINESS AND BACKSTABBING AMONGST MODELS,**

HOW MUCH OF A REALITY IS THAT? Well, you can expect that in any competitive environment. Yes, there is some gossip, and people that won't work with others, but I also have some cool friends in the industry. Hopefully, my blessed streak continues! **WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A MAN?** I look for a man who is confident, respectful, lighthearted, and loving. I think I've found my perfect match! **WITH SAME-SEX MARRIAGE NOW BEING LEGAL THROUGHOUT AMERICA, DO YOU PLAN ON GETTING A GIRLFRIEND OF YOUR OWN?** I love my man, but I am so happy whenever love wins! **WHAT ARE YOU UP TO FOR THE REST OF 2015?** That would be the biggest question in my life right now. For the longest time, my education ruled my life and actions. I don't exactly know what is coming next, but I can't wait to find out. —FARAI MAKONI







spring in your step

Herewith the attire to go with your creamy cappuccino, and that smirk on your face after closing a million-rand deal, sir.



This Page:

Shirt, Zara R600;
Shorts, Ted Baker
R1 000; Jersey,
Topman R430; Belt,
Brentwood R290;
Shoes, Ted Baker
R2 100; Sunglasses,
Diesel at Moscon
Optics R2 699;
Watch, Bulova at
JP Time R2 400



This Page:

Shirt, Ted Baker R900;

Pants, Zara R600;

Blazer, Scotch&Soda

R3 600; Sunglasses,

Persol at Luxottica

R2 795; Shoes,

Ted Baker R1 500



This Page:
Scarf, Zara R260;
T-shirt, Topman
R230; Shorts,
Ted Baker
R1 000; Belt,
Brentwood R290;
Watch, Bulova at
JP Time R6 400



This Page:
Shirt, Zara R400;
Pants, Zara R700;
Bag, Ted Baker
R5 000; Sunglasses,
Zara R400

This Page:
Suit, Muratti by John
Craig R17 000;
Shorts, Ted Baker
R1 200; Pocket
square, Ted Baker
R400; Sunglasses,
Persol at Luxottica
R2 410



Marooned

By Joe Keohane



I'm perched on the edge of a simple, thatched-roof shelter on the remote Indonesian island of Siroktabe, staring down an immaculate, white beach as the sun dips westward into the Indian Ocean, shocking the sky a glorious orange-pink. I feel good. Great, in fact. I am the only human being for kilometres. I am supposedly here to be tested, to survive. But here, now, surrounded by Earth's rich bounty, I think, "This isn't surviving. This is living."

BACK UP A COUPLE OF WEEKS. THERE IS A SMALL COMPANY IN HONG KONG, Docastaway, that specialises in dropping people on desert islands in Asia, Oceania, or Central America, to survive by their own wits for as long as they want to, or can bear it (they also offer “comfort” packages, featuring all of the seclusion and none, or at least far less, of the hardship). *Maxim* thought I might like to give it a shot. Why me? Because I have essentially no survival skills, whatsoever. I’m a creature of the city. On the whole, nature in the raw holds little appeal for me. I just don’t really know what to do with it. I’m also a profoundly pale man, paler than the ass of an Irish ghost in January. And a ginger. My brother once said I look like a marshmallow topped with carrot shavings. Which means that in addition to my issues with nature, I also hate the beach. And seafood.

Still, the idea of coming here was appealing, as I’d imagine it would be to all men. Most of us suspect, and a few know with certainty, that if the shit really came down, we’d be able to summon some dormant primordial power, some untapped cunning and resourcefulness and grit, and conquer the situation, whatever it was. We’d show what we’re really made of. We’d tap into a vestigial wildness. We’d survive. But would we? The plan was this, I would travel from New York, to Dubai, to Jakarta, and then take two more planes, followed by a car ride to a small fishing village, where I’d hand over a brick of Indonesian cash to pay for the experience, and then be ferried, finally, to a location I am contractually prohibited from revealing (Docastaway generally rents publicly owned, but little-known islands from governments, or locals, and doesn’t want to broadcast their locations to the world. It calls this island “Siroktabe,” not its real name). Once there, I’d stay three full days, with minimal equipment, a speargun, a canoe, a machete. My contact at the company, cofounder Alvaro Cerezo, stressed that this was meant to replicate an authentic experience. “A castaway don’t know nothing,” he said, “You know nothing. You need to eat. You need to drink.” When I asked for some very basic survival tips, he hesitated. It’s best that I suffer, he said, “Otherwise, it’s a holiday.” “Seems reasonable,” I thought. I may have been inordinately excited about the speargun.

On the appointed day, off I went, hauling a bag containing some borrowed outdoor clothes, and a stupid-looking hat, sunscreen, industrial insect repellent, a torch, and malaria pills. I was nervous, but confident. How bad could it really be? There were banana trees, I was told. If the fishing was bad, or the coconuts scarce, I’d just eat the bananas. Problem solved. Besides, it’s three days. Anything’s tolerable for three days.

FROM OUR BOAT, Siroktabe looms across the water. Bigger than I’d expected. Quite big, actually, with a narrow ribbon of beach surrounding a dense jungle that soars to a mountain peak in the centre, and heaps of black, volcanic boulders at either end. Even from afar, this place is spectacularly beautiful.

The boat edges up to the island, and we hop off into the shallow water. My guide gives me the rundown, showing me the simple, thatched-roof shelter that will be my home, and points out a pot, a pan, and a gas-powered camp stove. Slightly annoyed, I resolve not to use the stove. I didn’t come here to be pampered. Otherwise, how will I know what I’m made of? But okay. He tells me about the great swarms of bats that come out around sunset. The pythons that make the island home. He demonstrates the speargun. Before he leaves, he leads me to a patch where I can dig up cassava, a root vegetable found via its marijuana-looking leaves. He reaches down, pops one out of the soft, a nice fat one, and hands it to me. There are also almonds around, he says, pointing at one. You just have to dig them out of their thick pods with a knife. And so I don’t die, he leaves me a few large bottles of water. And then he’s off. He will be on the next island over. If I get into trouble, there’s a cell phone and a walkie-talkie I can contact him with. “Good luck,” he says, “I’ll see you in a few days.” I walk back to the shelter. I notice an ant on my camera, and flick it off. The place is textbook paradise, verging on cliché. And hot. I’ve been here for 30 minutes, and I’m already pouring sweat.

I’m also pretty hungry. By this point I’ve been travelling for nearly two full days, and I’m running on just a couple hours of sleep, courtesy of some strange, windowless hotel room at the airport in Jakarta, with lights I couldn’t turn off. I haven’t eaten a proper meal in about 14 hours, except for some crackers I bought on a regional airline. But the crackers are long gone. Here you eat what you kill. So let’s start killing! I pick up the speargun, load it, cock it, aim it at a downed tree on the beach, and pull the trigger. The line attached to the spear catches my middle finger, and tears off a few layers of skin, a wound that will seep pus for three days. You win this time, tree!

Clearly I need a plan, but it’s hard to hatch one when you have no idea what you’re doing, or how nature works. Do I fish? Harvest? Hunt and gather? Where is the food exactly? And where are those bananas? I retire to my shelter to think. I stretch out my legs. When I awake several hours later, it’s almost dark. 5:30 P.M. Already? I hop up, and start walking along the edge of the jungle. No bananas. No coconuts. A few almonds. I come back to the shelter, try to start a fire with a lighter, some wood, and notebook paper, and fail. It’s damp and windy, and nothing will catch. Without fire, there is no boiling, and I’m not using that stove, so I end up gnawing down half that raw cassava in darkness. It’s not bad! Plus, all this chewing is



1



2



3



4



5



Going the Distance

Five ridiculously remote, deeply inconvenient getaways that are as far off the beaten path as you can get.

1. The Westfjords

Iceland

Tourists have been flocking to Iceland in droves, but the Westfjords region remains its last frontier. Granted, its isolation is partly due to its treacherous roads, ferocious Arctic storms, and deadly avalanches. Even many Icelanders think of the Westfjords as an impossibly brutal and far-off place, the mythical home of Vikings like Thorgerir, who killed innocent shepherds just for kicks. Lately, more and more adventure-minded types have been making their way here to hike the wildflower-strewn backcountry, and take part in the primary pastime, existential contemplation. — Christopher Bagley

2. Deception Island

Antarctica

It sounds like the fortress of a comic book supervillain. An active volcano in Antarctica's South Shetland Islands, this former whaling hub has no full-time population, but regularly hosts scientific researchers. The downside? Volcanologists classify it as a "restless caldera with a significant volcanic risk." We'll take our chances. — Gabriella Paiella

3. The Thorofare

USA

This is the furthest you can get off-road in the contiguous United States, 50 kilometres in a straight line from any byway. The massive meadow was once a major route for 19th-century trappers. Now, it's teeming with wildlife. The trip requires an 8-day,

110-kilometre hike, and the know-how to survive if things get ugly. And sometimes they do. A grizzly mauled a longtime outfitter here in 2002. The intrepid hiker, however, is rewarded with a sky flooded with stars and all-engulfing quiet, broken only by the occasional howl of a wolf. — Doug Schnitzspahn

4. Tristan da Cunha

Saint Helena

"People imagine that we wear grass skirts," says postmistress Iris Green, one of only 269 residents on Tristan da Cunha, the world's most remote inhabited island, "But once they see that we're civilised, they wonder why we'd want to live here." Simple. Tristan, an island 1 300km west of South Africa, is gorgeous. There's little more to do on Tristan than hike the 2 060-metre-high volcano, and quaff beers in the local bar. And that, of course, is the point. — Andy Isaacson

5. Grootberg Lodge

Namibia

Tucked between South Africa, Botswana, and Angola, Namibia is one of Africa's least populated nations, unless you count the baboons, antelopes, and zebras, and the world's largest free-roaming black rhino and cheetah populations. Located on a 4x4-only dirt drive, Grootberg Lodge has 16 private, solar-powered thatch-and-rock chalets, attracting just a handful of bold travellers. — Berne Broudy

probably strengthening my jaws. That could prove useful in the coming days, should I awaken with a python on my face.

What do castaways do at night? Think? Sleep? Cry? I decide to crack a book. I've long meant to read *Robinson Crusoe*, so I bought a copy before I left. I figure Daniel Defoe's would-be lawyer turned adventurer will make for good company. Just a couple of pampered city guys having a go at it in the wild. But I quickly discover Crusoe has a few advantages that I don't. Guns, for instance. Powder. And, wait, so the guy just winds up on the island, immediately finds water, climbs a tree, and has the best sleep of his life? Not exactly an "authentic castaway experience".

After a while, my torch starts to make the bugs go crazy, so I just sit down, and listen to the waves, and the rising chaos of the jungle as it gets down to the evening's business. The sky is clear. Nice breeze. I see a shooting star. I don't know if I've ever seen one of those before. My thoughts spool out, and go where they wish. A rare treat, only possible off the grid. Such a beautiful place. In time, I drift off.

I wake up at 4:40 A.M. having forgotten where I am. It's still dark. The wind is stronger, and the waves are slashing away at the shore. I read a little more *Crusoe*. He finds some goats, kills them, and butchers them. Just like that. If I tried that, I'd look like fucking Carrie after her prom. That is, if the goat didn't kill me first. I start to skim. The sun comes up at around 5:45. To my relief, I'm actually not feeling completely ravenous. A good sign! The body adapting naturally to its new circumstances. What I'm made of is emerging. I polish off the cassava, and eat an almond, and a malaria pill. I open my toothbrush case, and there's a big ant inside. Not sure how he got in there, or what he wants. Off you go.

Teeth brushed, corpus freshly sheep-dipped in sunscreen and bug repellent, I set out for food, walking the length of the long beach in search of cassava leaves, bananas, and coconuts. What a beautiful place. Paradise! But also with the sort of absolute indifference that so often accompanies great beauty. I find one coconut, a brown one, and some hard, spiky green thing that I gingerly pull off a tree, thinking it looks like something I saw in a market once. After a dozen machete blows, the coconut duly surrenders its sweet juice. Unfortunately, it also surrenders an alarming number of small beetles and worms that had been living inside it. I recoil, and throw it into the jungle. The green thing is also a bust. Hard as a cricket ball, thorny, inedible. I spot some decent crabs, but they're fast. And some hermit crabs, nature's little slapstick comedians, countering danger and fear with pratfalls, tumbling off logs, or tipping over anytime anything comes near. I admire their preposterously unconvincing nonchalance whenever they get spooked. It delights me. I've put them on a do-not-kill list for the moment. I like to think they register my lack of ill will, but most likely they just think I'm an arsehole. It's hot. And it kind of smells here in the shelter. Like black pepper, oranges, and petrol. Wonder what that is. For the next few hours, I traverse the beach, and occasionally hack my way into the jungle. I spot three banana plants,

but as I make my way through the brush, watching my feet for hidden dangers, I nearly walk face-first into the web of an evil-looking, black-and-yellow spider. In the days ahead, I will see its sinister ilk all over the island, and in my dreams. No bananas, though.

I spend the rest of the afternoon foraging. I trek through the jungle, towards a towering coconut tree, but there are no coconuts on the ground, and I can't climb the trunk. I find a couple more almonds, a large, rectangular, green pod-looking thing, and what I hope is a viable coconut. Back at the base, I get the almonds open with the knife, and eat them. Then I go after the coconut. I hit it a dozen times, two dozen times, harder and harder, but all the blows ultimately do is reveal some strange, greasy, matted brown hair inside, mingled with fragments of rotting, greenish coconut meat. I tear all the hair out with the serrated edge of the machete, and spread it onto the beach, leaving it to dry in the sun, hoping I can burn it later. The pod thing yields four strange, pearlescent beans. Each looks like the human vagina as interpreted by H.R. Giger. I taste a bit of one to see if it will make me sick. It tastes like nothing. Maybe a bit like celery. I don't get sick. I eat two, and set two aside.

With the sun sinking and the wind picking up, I head back to the shelter.

There is a Jonestown of dead ants on the mattress. I pick one up and eat it. It's a little bitter. I try to make a fire, this time with the coconut hair and some good-looking, dry timber I found on the beach. No go. I take a swim to cool off, and attempt to wring some pleasure from the experience. It works, and I return to shore before dark. Clouds engulf the landmass in the distance, and for a while, I can't even make out the horizon. When the rain finally arrives, it comes in hard, each drop hitting the shelter like a ball thwacking a catcher's mitt. I fold myself into the one spot not getting pelted. This storm is like the end of the world. It's exciting.

I start to think. Why do we do things like this to ourselves? Probably no man is immune to the odd pang of guilt about being so utterly dependant on modern civilisation, that inane and emasculating matrix, so detached from whatever being a man meant a century or two ago. We hope it's simply the cushy circumstances of our daily lives, and not a general lack of grit or character, that keeps us from achieving a more rugged, self-determining kind of manliness. We just need to prove it.

But as I sit here, it occurs to me that the premise is all wrong. We don't need to prove it. Or at least I don't. Our heroic forefathers,

the generations of gritty survivors, were no more eager to feel discomfort than we are, they simply lived in a harsher world, raised by those who survived it long enough to pass along a few crucial skills. They warred against discomfort. In fact, the whole arc of human progress is about warring against discomfort. And by that rationale, to actively court it is to spit in the eye of our ancestors. John Adams said he studied politics and war so his sons would be free to study math and philosophy, which would give their kids "a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain."

Advance the cause of liberty a few more generations, and you get series



From Top: The author digs a raw almond from its protective pod; a view of the ocean from the thatched-roof shelter that will be his home for three days.

binges, and selfie sticks, and the burger they serve at this place near my apartment.

AT 5:30 A.M., I wake up and pop a malaria pill. Are there any calories in malaria pills? The label says, "Take with food. May cause dizziness." Way ahead of you there, buddy. I've never been this hungry before. Nothing of any substance in about 55 hours. Usually, when you're hungry, you just feel it in your stomach. But at this point, it's a full body state, fuzzy, a bit delirious, a little euphoric, actually, at least when I'm not laboriously trudging through the sand like a sad and dying Charlie Brown.

I'm told the fishing is best in the morning and just before sundown, so I head out. About 45 metres from the beach stands a coral reef, which becomes denser and more vibrant as you follow it, eventually leading to a steep shelf that plunges vertiginously into the black deep. The big fish, I assume, are deeper in the water, but the closer I get to the shelf, the more I feel the powerful current sucking me out to sea. I decide to be careful, wary of pitting my dog paddle against a pitiless sea on negative calories.

Earlier at home, a friend asked me if I had even the slightest idea how hard spearfishing is. I told him I just assumed that the fish obligingly sidles up beside you and bats its eyelashes, as you blow some cold steel through its chest cavity. In the shallows, the fish are small and pretty, rendering the speargun and myself ridiculous. If I do manage to hit one, all that will be left is a fluorescent-purple smoke ring. I hold fire.

Back to the jungle. I hack in. See a coconut tree. Shake a coconut tree. Nothing. Back to the beach. Try fire again. No fire. Why is there no fire? Have I started a fire before? My stomach pipes up. If you won't feed me, I will start eating you.

Hot. I shoo away an ant. Dumb. Why waste the energy? This place still smells. It's worse, actually. Oh, wait. The smell is me. I take a nice, brown piss.

Finally, I just say, "Fuck it," and start eating leaves. There are some near my shelter that look vaguely not poisonous. I take a bite of one. It's okay. Huh. Actually kind of delicious. But then my stomach begins to recoil. These leaves are kind of oily, cloying. And what's this milky stuff coming out of them? I can hardly get them down. I finally cave and try to get the little stove going, hoping to boil them, but I can't even get that to work. The leaves aren't helping. So hungry. Ants again. I should just let them do what they want. Give it a day, boys, and you can dance across my dead eyeballs as I'm sung back home in the arms of a python. Do pythons have arms? Am I



From top: A speargun can be great if you know how to use it, but leaves are not an ideal replacement for toilet paper.

folding? What day is this?

Machetes are good for burying human faeces, but leaves make poor toilet paper. Need something with texture. Ripped-out last page of *Crusoe* does the job. Is this all bullshit? Coming here to survive? Handing off a brick of rupiah to a guy in front of mystified villagers in order that I might live worse off than they do for a short time? I am spectacularly unfit for this. I don't seem to be made of anything.

BUT WAIT, I am made of something. I do have a survival skill, the one city dwellers have had since time immemorial, employed any time they find themselves in a situation they can't handle. It's known as calling a guy. I have a guy! I swallow my pride. I pick up the phone. I text the guide on the neighbouring island. "I need food," I write, "And coconuts, too, if you have any over there." Within seconds, my phone buzzes with his reply, "Coming, sir." Shortly thereafter, my guide arrives, accompanied by a fisherman, and starts the fire. It takes him two tries (not so easy, is it?). He has brought three freshly caught fish, "Traveller fish," he calls them. The fisherman, who is also eager to help with the coconut situation, leads us into the

jungle. The guy plunges forward into the brush, then calls back to us to stop. He says the ants are bad up ahead.

When he returns, it's with an armful of young coconuts. The good ones, with the sweet, delicious water inside. Back at camp, the guide shows me how to open them with the machete. Hack off the end. Drink. Glorious, fizzy. Then use the cleaned-up, hacked-off bit of husk as a spoon to dig out the meat. The fish is grilled and served sweet and perfectly charred on a banana leaf.

As I eat, I tell the guide how quickly fucked I became. He tells me most people train before doing this. But these are the "survivors," he says. "You are not survivor. You are journalist," he tells me. I laugh. I eat, drink, relax. A storm is rolling in. They leave in the boat with a wave. Getting dark now. Such a beautiful place.

WHAT AM I MADE OF? I know now. I am made of a helpless reliance on, and I'd argue mastery of, the trappings of civilisation. The survivalist may scoff, but I'd argue it's far more useful to be good at navigating civilisation than to know how to catch a fish. For thousands of years, men have fought and died to create and defend and advance civilisation. I'm willing to bet that what they've made is pretty durable, held aloft by those of us willing to work hard to afford a small amount of personal space, a measure of comfort and safety. I do it gladly.

Anyway, that's what I'm thinking as I wade through the aqua shallows and climb onto the boat that will take me to the car, that will take me to a plane, and then to another plane, and another, and still another, across time zones, and finally to a bad-smelling taxi that will, at 8:30 A.M. on a rainy Monday in New York City, take me back to paradise. ■

After
a dozen
machete
blows, the
coconut
surrenders
its juice—
along with
numerous
beetles
and worms.

00 90 20 Street

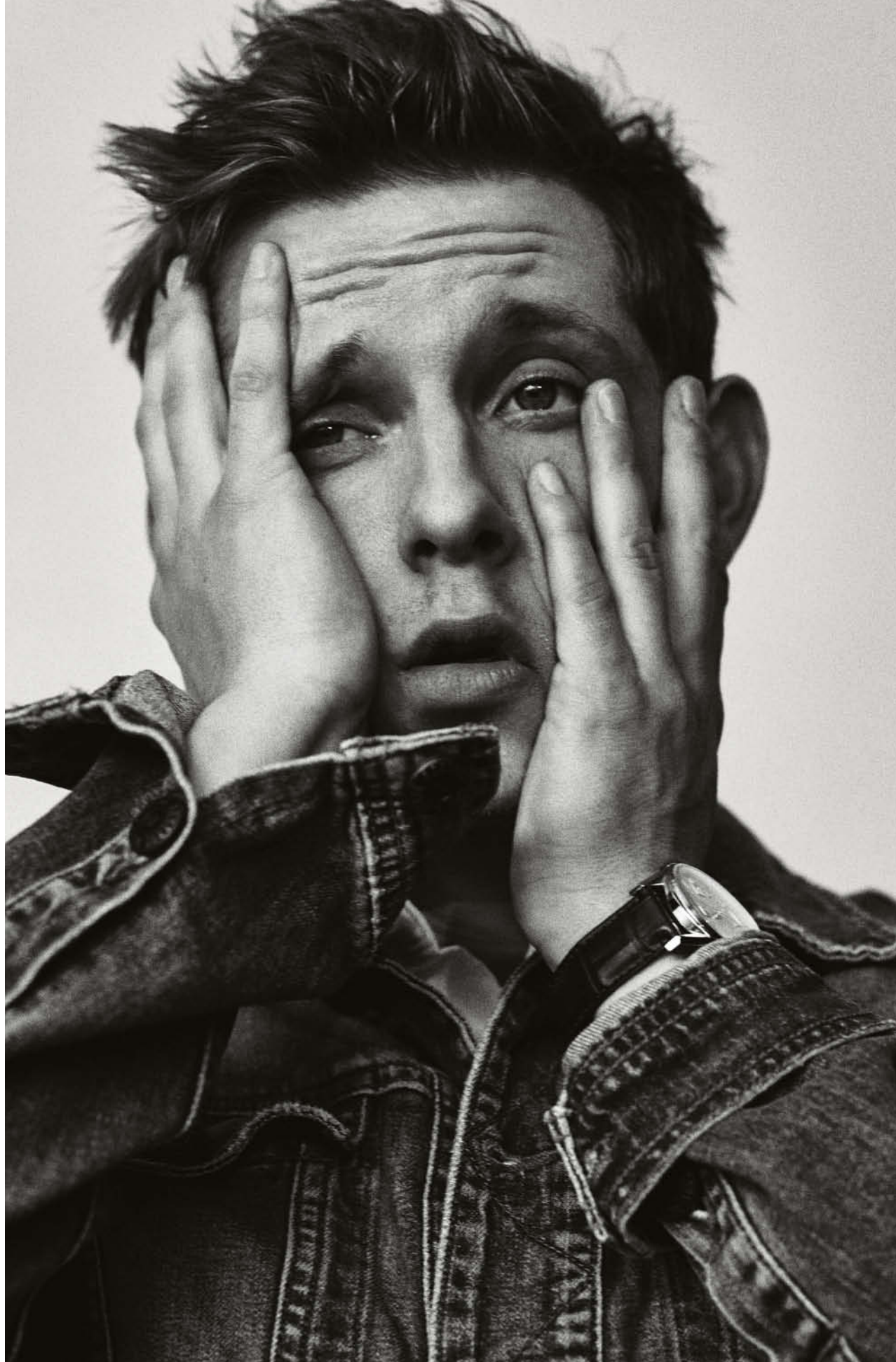
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Jacket,
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Jeans, Diesel.
Shoes, Red
Wing Heritage.

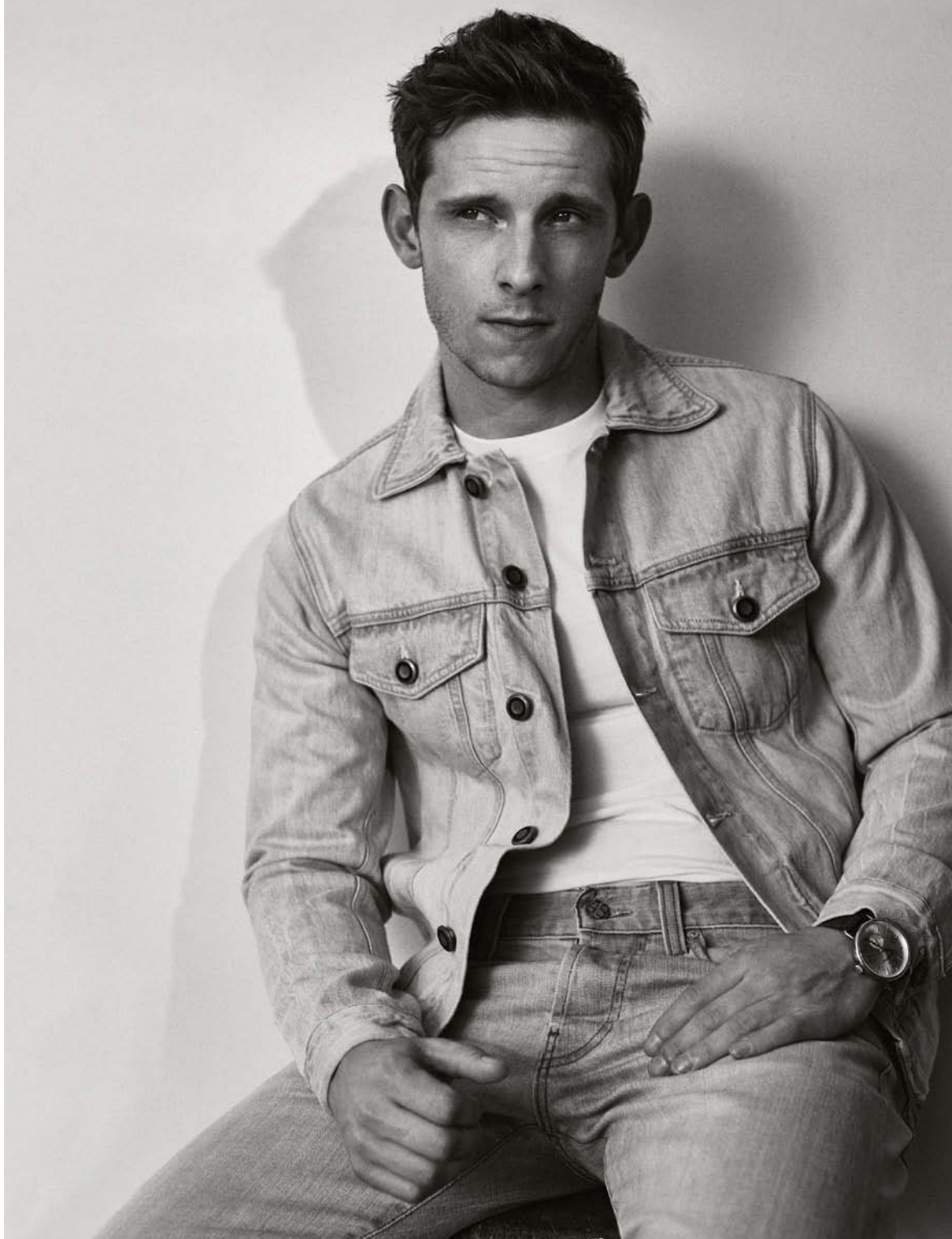
Opposite Page:
Jacket, Joe's
Jeans. Watch,
TAG Heuer.



Before
Jamie Bell
suits up
as Thing
in this
year's
*Fantastic
Four*, he
channels
Jack
Kerouac
in the
coolest
denim
looks.

by
Gabriella
Paiella





This Page:
Jacket, Calvin Klein Jeans.
T-shirt, Express.
Jeans, AG.
Watch, Bell & Ross.

Opposite Page:
Knit, Prada.
T-shirt, Dior Homme.
Jeans, Denim & Supply at Ralph Lauren.

WHEN YOU SEE JAMIE BELL IN THIS YEAR'S *FANTASTIC FOUR*, he'll be that great hulking thing, called Thing, covered head to toe in rock-like material, towering over the other cast members. It's quite a look for Bell, 29, who arrives for breakfast looking slim, sharp-featured, and lively. "I feel like I've aged since I've been here," he says with a groan.

It may seem odd to watch Bell, who pirouetted to fame in the critically-acclaimed *Billy Elliot*, lumbering and smashing his way through one of Marvel's blockbusters. Then again, we never thought we'd see little Billy whipping a bottomless Charlotte Gainsbourg, while she lay strapped to a couch in his sex dungeon, as he did in Lars von Trier's art-house flick *Nymphomaniac: Volume II*. But Bell has never let typecasting get in his way. "Luckily, there aren't that many

films about guy dancers, besides *Magic Mike* and *Step Up*," he jokes. Though Bell was thrust into the spotlight at an early age, he has neither crashed nor burnt, and he seems uniquely immune to the trappings of Hollywood. He doesn't watch TV (despite having the lead role in Revolutionary War drama *Turn: Washington Spies*), opting instead to devour political nonfiction books, and documentaries. And he's the father of a 2-year-old son with ex Evan Rachel Wood. As for his occasional forays into the limelight, "I always think I'm just gonna stand in a corner by myself."

Modest and self-effacing as Bell can be, he'll project a more aggressive demeanour when the film hits the screens. After all, as Thing might say, "It's clobberin' time!" ■





This Page:
Shirt, Club
Monaco. Jeans,
Topman.

Opposite Page:
Jacket, AG. Shirt,
Bottega Veneta.
T-shirt, Calvin
Klein. Jeans,
Buffalo David
Bitton. Watch,
Tissot.





This Page:
Crew neck,
Todd Snyder x
Champion.

Opposite Page:
Shirt, AG.
T-shirt, Michael
Kors. Jeans,
J Brand. Shoes,
Converse.
Watch, Tissot.

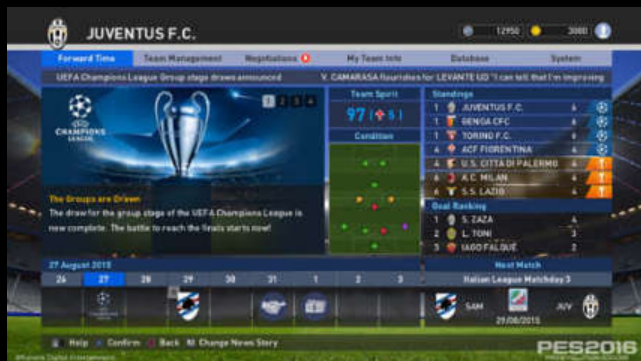


PES2016

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER

During the PlayStation 2 era, *Pro Evolution Soccer* ("PES" amongst its loyal fans) was the king of soccer games. *FIFA* might have the licences, but *PES* has the gameplay. Unfortunately for the Konami soccer series, things went a bit downhill during the PS3 / Xbox 360 generation, with *FIFA* finally catching up to the gameplay and presentation, dominating the soccer scene throughout that generation. However, things are about to change with the release of *Pro Evolution Soccer 2016* (*PES 2016*). The king of soccer games is back!

FOXY LOVE Built upon the impressive Fox Engine (the same one powering the popular *MGS V*), *PES 2016* looks amazing. From cover star Neymar's frighteningly realistic facial animation, to the international teams proudly belting out their national anthems, everything just looks prettier and shinier. With better visuals comes much better gameplay as well. Everything feels meatier, with the players feeling more grounded than in previous games. When a smaller player like Messi collides with a rock like Vincent Kompany, the impact is there for all to see. It adds so much more to the realistic feel of the game. **WHAT'S IN A NAME** Of course, one thing that *FIFA* has always had over the *PES* series is the official licencing of all the leagues. Although that hasn't really changed, *PES* does own the official Champions League licence, recreated beautifully to the smallest detail. The shivers that you feel when the official Champions League music plays are one of soccer's greatest little pleasures. Also featuring is the UEFA Europa League, as well as one massive addition this year, the rights to the highly anticipated UEFA EURO 2016. However, it's not quite clear yet how the latter will be added to the game when the tournament starts next year. The presentation has also received a major upgrade from the clunky menus from previous years. Everything feels more slick and instant, with the menus now making more sense. **THE BEAUTIFUL GAME** *PES 2016* is truly a return to form for the beloved soccer simulation. Gorgeous graphics, super slick gameplay, Konami has finally delivered the next-gen soccer experience fans have been waiting for. *FIFA* might be the current king in sales, but *PES 2016* is stacking up to be the true soccer fan's go-to game. Out on PC and current-gen consoles, *PES 2016* is everything you would want to recreate the beautiful game. — ANDRE COETZER



METAL GEAR SOLID V THE PHANTOM PAIN

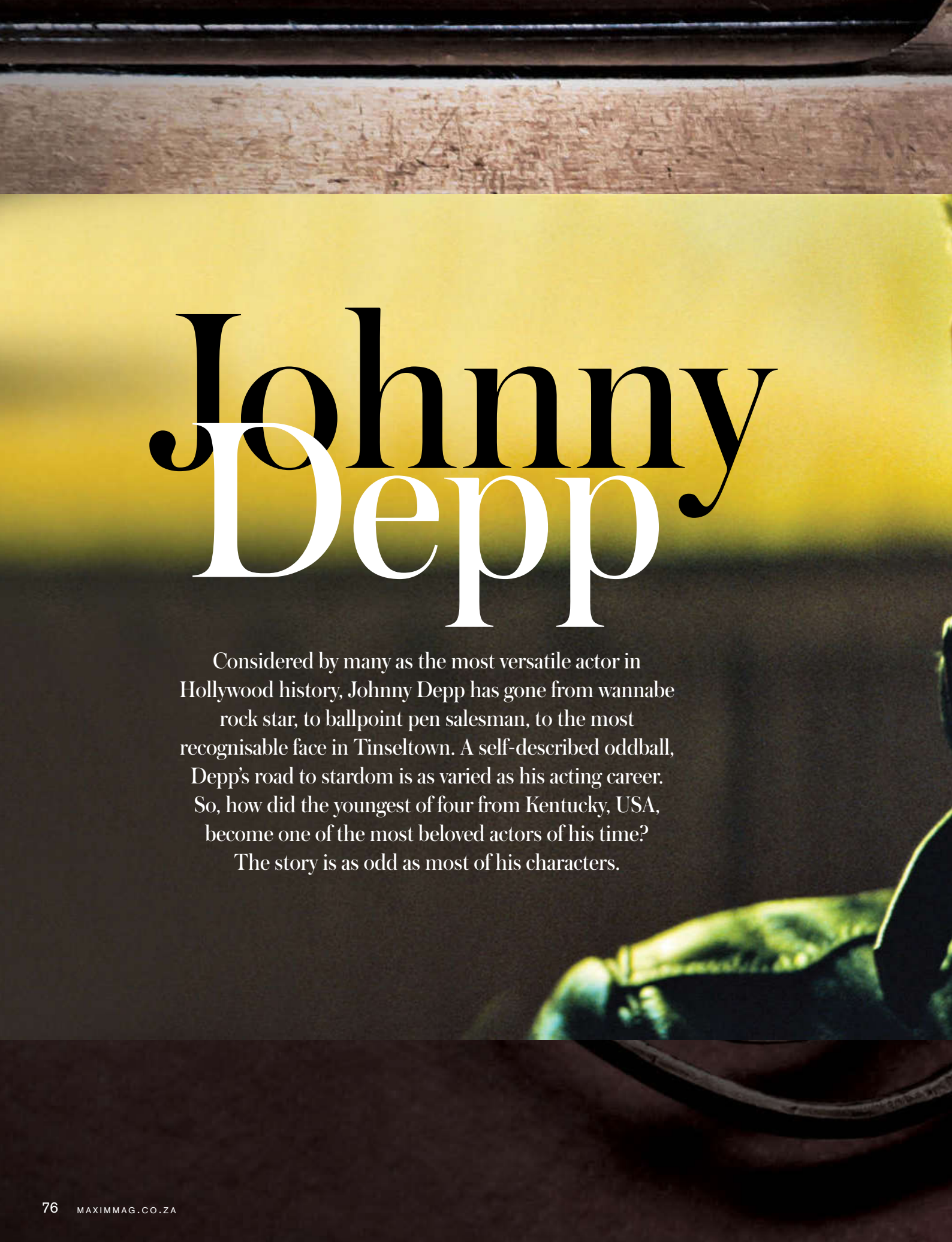
The *Metal Gear Solid* (MGS) series is seen by many as one of the greatest of all time. From the visionary mind of Hideo Kojima, MGS is a series of stealth and close quarters combat, convoluted yet amazing storylines, and probably the greatest boss fights to ever appear on our TVs. It's been seven years since *MGS 4* was released on the PS3, and now the genius of Kojima will be set loose onto our shiny, new consoles. Prepare for (potentially) the greatest game ever made.

BIGGER AND BETTER BOSS *The Phantom Pain* sees the return of Big Boss (now called Venom Snake), star of the acclaimed *MGS 3*, as his story continues to unfold amongst betrayal, war crimes, and revenge. It's the most expansive story yet, with Kojima promising that this will bring all the previous *MGS* storylines together. Having been in a coma for over 9 years, Snake awakens, only to find he is missing an arm. Unfortunately for our hero, the hospital is under attack, and he needs to escape immediately. When he eventually escapes, Snake sets out on getting revenge on the mercenaries that did this to him. We've kept the story quite vague, as any more details will spoil some amazing surprises. Also, unlike previous games in the series, *Phantom Pain* is light on cut scenes, a great departure from the movie-length cut scenes of *MGS 4*. Kojima has finally found the perfect mix of storytelling and action.

IT'S A BIG, BIG WORLD The previous *MGS* games were synonymous with sneaking around tight corridors and claustrophobic army bases, but that has all changed. For the first time in the series' history, Snake now finds himself in a truly open world. Players aren't guided around anymore, as missions can be finished in whatever way they choose. Carefully sneak around the base, tactically taking out all the guards without being spotted, or jump in a tank and just blast your way through. Room for experimenting is endless. From a graphic standpoint, *Phantom Pain* is one of the most beautiful games ever made. The massive open world looks gorgeous, the facial animation is near lifelike, and little things, like Snake's movement animation, are leaps and bounds ahead of anything else out there.

A CHANGE WILL DO YOU GOOD The amount of content, the added new features, this is almost overwhelming, and we would need another 10 extra pages to cover all of it. Kojima has outdone himself, delivering, quite possibly, the best game ever. Even if you're not a fan of the previous *MGS* games, you will find something to love. For fans of the series, this is everything you hoped for and more. *The Phantom Pain* is, without a doubt, a masterpiece, a truly unique experience that only the genius of Hideo Kojima could conceive. If you own a current-gen console, then the choice is simple, buy, play, and experience quality. — ANDRE COETZER





Johnny Depp

Considered by many as the most versatile actor in Hollywood history, Johnny Depp has gone from wannabe rock star, to ballpoint pen salesman, to the most recognisable face in Tinseltown. A self-described oddball, Depp's road to stardom is as varied as his acting career. So, how did the youngest of four from Kentucky, USA, become one of the most beloved actors of his time?

The story is as odd as most of his characters.



HERE'S JOHNNY! In 1979, a 16-year-old John Christopher Depp II dropped out of high school to focus on his music dreams, joining local neighbourhood garage band, the Kids. Although never quite hitting the big time, the band did well enough to open for 80s legends Talking Heads, and the B-52's, yet money was still scarce for Depp and his fellow bandmates, forcing them to live for months in a friend's 1967 Chevy Impala. At the age of 20, Depp met and married 25-year-old makeup artist Lori Allison. On her suggestion, Depp and his band moved to Los Angeles, with the hopes of striking it big. But the City of Angels can be a tough place, and Depp and his band were going nowhere, selling pens for a telemarketing firm to make ends meet. Depp was starting to regret a lot of decisions.

In 1984, however, things took an interesting turn for the 21-year-old hustler when his wife introduced him to her ex, Nicolas Cage. Immediately seeing potential in Depp, Cage encouraged Depp to take up acting lessons, as he felt Depp had the right look to make it big. After several small roles as a film extra, his first significant role came in the form of a little horror film called, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Even though the movie was a huge success, Depp still had other issues to deal with. His marriage with Allison was falling apart, eventually leading to divorce. The band was going nowhere, and the members decided to go their own separate ways. With everything falling apart around him, Depp threw himself into acting, giving all of his time to acting classes, and even turning to a private coach. The lessons paid off in 1987, when Depp replaced Jeff Yagher in the role of undercover cop Tom Hanson, in the popular TV series, *21 Jump Street*. Depp became a superstar, an overnight teen idol... a title he resented.

When his contract on *21 Jump Street* expired in 1989, Depp walked away from the series that made him a household name, in pursuit of meatier roles, and to further his acting career.

JOHNNY (NOT) BE GOOD Desperate to shake off his teen-idol status, Depp was adamant to change his image, seeking out unconventional roles. His wish came true when he was casted as the freaky outsider Edward Scissorhands, in Tim Burton's movie with the same name. It was Depp like you've never seen him before. The movie was a hit, making more than \$54 million (about R700 million). Following the film's success, Depp carved a niche for himself as a serious, somewhat dark, idiosyncratic performer seeking out roles that would surprise his fans and critics alike. Next up was a Golden Globe-nominated performance as Sam, a social misanthrope in the 1993 hit, *Benny & Joon*, followed by *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, playing a young man dissatisfied with the limitations of his small-town life. This was also the movie that saw the debut of a future Hollywood superstar, Leonardo DiCaprio.

Professionally, Depp was hitting all the right notes, however, his personal life was in a shambles. A tumultuous relationship with supermodel Kate Moss saw Depp dabbling in drugs, spiralling into a deep depression, famously trashing a New York hotel room after one of the couples' many fights. Depp also owned one of the hippest nightclubs, the infamous Viper Room, synonymous with the death of fellow actor River Phoenix after a drug overdose outside the club. Depp's personal life was a mess. However, his wild behaviour did not affect his professional life, as the big hits kept rolling in. Another Golden Globe nomination was on the cards, as Depp once again teamed up with Tim Burton for the biopic, *Ed Wood*. *Donnie Brasco* was up next, where Depp played an under-

cover FBI agent seeking to infiltrate the Bonanno crime family. He then went on to star in the Terry Gilliam cult classic, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, playing the part of real-life gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson's alter ego. During filming, Depp cultivated a strong friendship with the controversial journalist, a friendship that lasted until Thompson's death in 2005.

The 90s were a great decade for Johnny Depp, but the start of the next decade would be his biggest yet.

FROM PIRATES TO PAN In 2004, Depp would undertake his most successful role ever, that of pirate Captain Jack Sparrow in the hit, *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Audiences fell in love with the character that was loosely based on the mannerisms of Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards. Depp was so convincing as the drunk and comedic pirate that he received his first Academy Award nomination. However, Depp went the opposite direction for his next role, playing the part of *Peter Pan* creator J.M. Barrie, in the moving and incredibly sad *Finding Neverland*. The film earned him more than 10 award nominations. In 2006, Depp returned to Captain Jack, which broke box office records. The third instalment of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise did even better, bringing in \$138.8 million (about R2 billion) on its first weekend. Once again, teaming up with Tim Burton, Depp's next role would be his oddest one yet, starring in the dark and gory musical, *Sweeney Todd*, which tells the story of a barber who kills his customers to have them turned into pies by his neighbour. The movie might have been weird, but Depp's performance once again wowed the crowd, earning him another Golden Globe. But the oddball roles did not stop there for Depp, from *Alice in Wonderland*'s Mad Hatter, to Barnabas Collins, a vampire who escapes imprisonment and returns to his family home, only to annoy the current family living there. It was clear by now that Depp was not your average Hollywood actor. His insistence on playing challenging and odd characters only strengthened his versatility, and in 2015, he might be playing his toughest and most inspiring role yet.

MURDER MOST FOUL Set for release later this year, *Black Mass* is an American crime film based on the 2001 book, *Black Mass: The True Story of an Unholy Alliance Between the FBI and the Irish Mob*, by Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill. The film depicts the true story of Whitey Bulger (Depp), a prominent leader of organised crime in the U.S.' South Boston, Massachusetts. Whitey is the brother of William "Billy" Bulger, a senator in Massachusetts. Following a string of violent acts, he becomes an FBI informant for 30 years, in order to take down a Mafia family invading his turf. The film focuses on the period of the late 70s and early 80s, as Whitey was solidifying his position as leader of the Irish-American Winter Hill Gang. The film is gritty and often disturbing in its portrayal of Whitey, a role Depp was clearly up for as he delivers his absolute best. Surrounded by an all-star cast, from Benedict Cumberbatch, to Kevin Bacon, to Dakota Johnson, *Black Mass* is set to be one of the best movies released this year, and another feather in Depp's acting cap.

Through the years, Johnny Depp has shown that he is indeed the chameleon of the silver screen. From a drunken pirate, to an Irish mobster, from a demonic barber, to a drug-fuelled gonzo journalist, Depp has done it all. You would think that nothing Depp does can surprise anymore... that is until his next movie comes out.

— ANDRE COETZER



THE STOWAWAYS

An amazing new crop of getaway vehicles can be collapsed for easy transport. You just have to know when to fold 'em...

by MATT BERICAL



Sea

Made from a single sheet of pre-creased, corrugated polypropylene, the 4-metre-long, 25-inch-wide Bay+ kayak breaks down into a 13-kilogram, portfolio-style case that's small enough to sling over a shoulder, stow behind a couch, or get on a plane. The single-passenger vessel takes about 20 minutes to assemble, and is as nimble on the water as its more unwieldy counterparts. And despite its take-anywhere design, it is equipped with an adjustable bucket seat, a strap-down deck rigging, and a waterproof deck hatch, making it suitable for even the most intrepid tours. orukayak.com



Air

First class feeling a bit too cramped? Then pilot the Icon A5, an amphibious, light aircraft that can be hitched to a car, and take off from just about anywhere. Articulating wings fold flat to make the carbon-fibre personal plane simple to store or carry, and it requires only a sport-pilot licence to operate. The A5's 100-hp engine is good for 563 kilometres per tank, and runs on regular unleaded; it can set down on both land and water, and its interior has a simple-to-decipher instrument cluster and controls.

iconaircraft.com



Land

Able to transform from an easy-to-carry, 18.9-by-31.5-inch package, into a lithe commute conqueror in less than 10 seconds, the 27-speed Tern Verge S27h is crammed with a suite of seldom-seen, ride-enhancing extras, such as a high-efficiency dynamo hub that transfers pedal strokes into device-charging energy, and a bike seat that doubles as a tyre pump.

ternbicycles.com

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VIDEO & PHOTO SPECS

VIDEO



1080P 30FPS
1060P 30FPS
720P 60FPS
720P 120FPS

PHOTO



SINGLE 10MP
BURST UP TO 10/S

SLOWMOTION



1080P 60
720P 120
WVGA 240

CINEMA



4K 10FPS
2.7K 30FPS

TIMELAPSE



1080P 10FPS
(CAPTURE AT 1/3, 1/5, 1/10, 1/15, 1/30, 1/60)
4K 10FPS

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Spring Ready

You've spent winter months hidden away under layers of fabric, sharpening the accessories needed to kill it this spring, and here they are.



Bag, Ted Baker
R5 000



From Centre,
Clockwise:

Bulova at JP Time
R6 400; TW Steel
at Luxco Importers
R7 950; Bulova at
JP Time R3 000;
Michel Herbelin
at Luxco Importers
R13 950; TW Steel
at Luxco Importers
R9 500; Michel
Herbelin at Luxco
Importers R12 950;
Bulova at JP Time
R2 400; TW Steel
at Luxco Importers
R8 500



This Page,
from Top:
Zara R400;
Persol at Luxottica
R2 410; Diesel at
Moscon Optics
R2 699; Ray-Ban
at Luxottica R2 060



This Page:
Sneakers, Puma
Swash London
R2 500

Opposite Page:
Shorts, Scotch&Soda
R1 900



مشاة هي
لي تتألف
لي قادرة
ماية لل
يق
لجميع كوادر المهمة
ين لإطلاق النار وقائد
اء قاعدة لإطلاق النار،
، أو إجراء المشاغلة
إطلاق النار، في
ضع التالي
ن لديه قائدين
بتمكن من

والأحد الأمين، قاعدة
مال الفريق الآخر إلى المو
البحر. أمر الحاضرة يكون
منه لقيادة الفريقين، لكي
سيطرة على الفريق بأكملها

The American

Can
a
former
prep-schooler
help
protect
the
Christians
of
Mesopotamia
from
the
Islamic
State?
A
dispatch
from
northern
Iraq.
by
Adam
Linehan

IF THERE WERE AN AWARD FOR THE AMERICAN WITH THE LONGEST rap sheet in the Middle East, Matthew VanDyke would be a top contender. By his own estimate, the 36-year-old lionheart from the U.S.' south Baltimore has been arrested in Iraq no fewer than 20 times, each time for essentially the same offence, being an American with no official business in Iraq. The last time, he and a friend were mistaken for Al-Qaeda operatives at an Iraqi Army checkpoint on the road from Iraq's Kurdistan to Baghdad. They were on motorbikes, headed to the Iraqi capital to begin filming an adventure documentary called *Warzone Bikers: Baghdad to Bagram*.

VanDyke's bike was damaged during the arrest, and after he defiantly asked the Iraqi soldiers to fix it, the duo were hooded, beaten, and driven to a compound in Baghdad, where they were lined up against a wall, and mock-executed. "I figured we were going to die, but I wasn't about to give them the satisfaction of seeing me afraid," VanDyke says, "But don't worry. Those days are over." I'm glad to hear it, because right now as he's telling the story, we're driving through Iraq on some very unofficial business.

There are two others in the Toyota Hilux, an ex-U.S. Army paratrooper called Kojak, and our driver, a burly Iraqi in his early 30s, with a DIY tattoo

of a cross on his wrist. The Iraqi, I'm convinced, is trying to kill us, swerving through an endless procession of oil trucks at 145 kilometres per hour, as we ascend along a narrow, two-lane road into the bright-green mountains of Kurdistan.

Sitting shotgun, VanDyke is the only one wearing a suit, his chin-length hair slicked back like an '80s-era investment banker, or a Hollywood hit man. Kojak is sporting the usual gun-for-hire getup, a cap, tactical cargo pants, and a vigilant stare on his bearded face. I'm hung over, squinting like a newborn, because I left my Ray-Bans. It's a confusing sight for the peshmerga soldiers manning the numerous checkpoints that line the route to Dohuk, a remote mountain town that is a part of Kurdistan, about 80 kilometres north of Iraq's Mosul. Each time we're stopped, I try not to imagine what the soldiers would do if they discovered the cache of flak jackets, camouflage uniforms, and tactical radios hidden beneath our luggage in the bed of the truck. Or if they knew that we're on our way to meet with members of a Christian paramilitary group, so my two American compatriots can begin training and equipping them to go to war. But VanDyke doesn't seem the least bit concerned. He's done this before.

IMAGINE IF SOMEONE handed you a button and said that if you pressed it, a firing squad would wipe out a whole platoon of Islamic State fighters. Chances are you'd press it all day. The importance of defeating the Islamic State is one thing citizens of the civilised world can agree on. But when a guy, a civilian with no actual skin in the conflict, picks up a rifle and heads to the front, his motives are immediately called into question. Is he a lunatic? A zealot? A profiteer? Since taking up arms with rebel forces during the Libyan civil war in 2011, VanDyke has found his life's calling as a frontline player in a myriad of Middle East conflicts. To some, he's a man of action, a champion of the underdog, a self-styled revolutionary who's willing to give his life to help justice and democracy prevail in one of the most oppressive regions of the world. To others, he's simply a guy who likes sticking his nose where it doesn't belong.

VanDyke's latest endeavour, a "non-profit security contracting firm" he recently established called Sons of Liberty International (SOLI), might just be his most polarising yet. Its mission is to provide "free security consulting and training services to vulnerable populations to enable them to defend themselves against terrorist and insurgent groups". Right now, that vulnerable population is the Christians of northern Iraq, an ancient ethnic minority group known as Assyrians, who took up arms when ISIS rampaged through their native land. The plight of the Assyrian people has sent shock waves through Christendom, raising concerns that their very existence is at stake. "More biblical activity took place in Iraq than in any other country in the world except Israel," says former U.S. congressman Frank Wolf, who thinks the U.S. should provide more military aid to alleviate the crisis, "Abraham is from Iraq. Ezekiel is buried there. Daniel is buried there. It's the birthplace of Christianity." In many ways, SOLI's approach to counterterrorism mirrors a key pillar of



U.S. military strategy in the Middle East, training, advising, and assisting indigenous forces on the battlefield. VanDyke, however, has never served in a conventional military, and SOLI has no official ties to any government, Iraqi or otherwise. But as the international community scrambles to devise an effective strategy to "degrade and destroy" the most formidable terrorist organisation to emerge in the 21st century, the situation on the ground is sliding further into chaos, an "anything goes" environment with scores of private militias, advocacy groups, and

mercenaries pouring into the fight daily, each with their own unique motivations and objectives. "Obviously, ISIS isn't a nation state, but this should be dealt with by nation states," says Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who commanded NATO forces in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010, "Whenever you have private organisations or armies enter in wars, you get dynamics that can be bad, no matter how well-intentioned they are." As for VanDyke, his intentions are clear, help the Assyrians drive the Islamic State from their ancestral territory, which includes the ISIS stronghold of Mosul. It's a ludicrously ambitious undertaking, fraught with gruesome possibilities. But the chaos of war is fertile ground for grand strategies. Which raises a very big question... how far is he willing to go?



An NPU soldier manoeuvres during a simulated-combat exercise.

Previous Spread: VanDyke at the head of the SOLI classroom. A projector screen displays a lesson in combat leadership that's been translated into Arabic.



Above: Soldiers with the Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU) conduct room-clearing drills.

MATTHEW VANDYKE'S story begins amongst the narrow streets and row houses of south Baltimore. After his parents separated in 1980, a year after VanDyke was born, his father moved to another U.S. state, Louisiana. "My grandparents lived with us, so I might have been more spoilt as an only child," he says, "But generally, it was a pretty normal upbringing." VanDyke's mother, then a public school principal, entered him into Baltimore's prestigious private school system. There were piano and tennis lessons during the week, and science club at a local college on the weekends. But VanDyke never embraced the lifestyle of his affluent peers. "I didn't get along with the kids I went to high school with," he says, "I didn't go to their country clubs, and I wasn't part of their social circles."

He prevailed in academia nonetheless. After graduating with a degree in political science, VanDyke was accepted into an extremely competitive security studies programme at an affluent Foreign Service university at the ripe age of 22. "They almost didn't take me, because I was too young," he says, "But I came out of undergrad with extremely high marks, and good recommendations from professors. So, they took me purely on academics." At the university, he decided to focus on Arab culture, and the Middle East, a decision that, in the aftermath of 9/11, all but guaranteed a career in foreign service. But not quite. "My first semester, the CIA gave me an offer of employment," VanDyke recalls, "I got really far through the process, nailed the initial interview and the assessment of my analytical abilities. I even met my future coworkers.

But then, I got nervous during the polygraph. The position was supposed to start immediately. So, they said, 'Just apply next year.'"

The American-led invasion of Iraq started soon after, and VanDyke quickly decided that the U.S. military strategy was doomed to failure. No longer interested in pursuing a career with the CIA, he instead got involved in the anti-war movement at his university. "Most of the people in the movement were peace-loving types," he recalls, "Not me. I was like, 'We do need to get rid of Saddam, but we need to do it a different way.' I wanted what was later done in Libya, air support and supplying local ground forces to have people liberate themselves."

After a year of working in a boatyard, "basically just chilling on the beach," VanDyke embarked on a dangerous journey that would consume the next three years of his life. Inspired by Australian documentary filmmaker Alby Mangels, known for his World Safari series, VanDyke's film, *Warzone Bikers: Baghdad to Bagram*, was to be a chronicle of his

journey biking through some of the world's most hostile territories. "When Alby did his adventures in the '70s and '80s, it was a big deal to go to Africa," he explains, "But now a lot of people go to Africa. So, I had to update it for the 21st century. But I didn't just throw a dart at a map. I had a strong background in what I was doing." Equipped with helmet cams and a handheld video camera, VanDyke captured his travels through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan,

"Most of the people in the movement were peace-loving types. Not me."

Libya. It was, in his words, a “quest for adulthood,” one that nearly cost him his life on several occasions.

When VanDyke returned to the States in late 2010, he thought it would be for good. And then news broke that the Arab Spring protests in Libya had erupted into a revolution. During his travels, VanDyke had made some of the best friends of his life in Libya. Within a few days, he was on a plane bound for North Africa, en route to join them as they prepared to take up arms against Gaddafi’s regime.

“You go to overthrow a government and you get caught, that’s what happens,” VanDyke says of the months he spent in solitary confinement after he was ambushed and captured by pro-Gaddafi forces in the early days of the war, “Maybe I can complain about the solitary confinement, because it’s psychological torture. But I was fortunate to be a prisoner of war for only six months, not like the 42 years of Libyans living under Gaddafi.”

Freedom came unexpectedly on August 24, 2011, when VanDyke was sprung from his cell during a prison uprising. News of his escape spread quickly. Suddenly, VanDyke was famous, and the world wanted to know how a private-school kid from America had ended up a POW in war-torn Libya. During his captivity, it was widely reported that VanDyke had been abducted while working as a journalist, a rumour that had originated with his mom. Before he left, VanDyke told her he was going to film the uprising. She believed him, unaware that he would actually be filming his own exploits on the battlefield.

When word got out that VanDyke had actually taken up arms during the revolution, the close-knit cadre of Middle Eastern foreign correspondents and human rights workers rallied to condemn his involvement in the war. The Committee to Protect Journalists, which had worked closely with VanDyke’s mother to secure his release, issued a public statement titled, “VanDyke’s Deception Increases Risks for Journalists.” Peter Bouckaert, the emergencies director for Human Rights Watch, made a personal plea to VanDyke to go home. But he brushed off the entreaties, and instead rejoined his old unit to finish the fight. Ultimately, his access to the rebels kept his relationship with the journalism community partly intact, and he ended up befriending several correspondents, including James Foley. VanDyke had been on the ground since the start of the war, before NATO got involved and turned the tide in the rebels’ favour. By the time of his release, the revolution felt like his own. “When it started, there were only a few hundred of us in eastern Libya who had gone to fight, so it was very possible to make a difference on the front line,” he recalls nostalgically, “Then, after escaping prison and going back to the front line, that was the time, after Tripoli fell, when a lot of people had quit the revolution, because they didn’t want to be the last guy to die in a war. Everyone knew the fall of the regime was going to happen.”



From Top: Moses Moshi recently returned to Iraq after 25 years of self-imposed exile to join the NPU; Behnam Aboosh Abelmasseh is the commander of the NPU.

VanDyke continued fighting and filming until October 20, 2011, the day a bloodied Gaddafi was paraded through the outskirts of Sirte, and killed. Much of the footage he captured during that time would later appear in Marshall Curry’s *Point and Shoot*, a film about VanDyke that won the Best Documentary Award at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival, and a film VanDyke has come to resent. Curry, he says, got his story wrong (the director dismisses the claim).

Meanwhile, after more than 30 years of estrangement, VanDyke’s parents rekindled their relationship during his imprisonment. “The first time I met or even talked to my father was in the airport the day I got back from Libya,” he says. His parents have remained a couple since.

Months later, he smuggled himself into Syria with the goal of making a film to build international support for the Free Syrian Army. After a month in the besieged city of Aleppo, he released a short documentary about the resistance movement there. It’s unclear whether the film, titled *Not Anymore: A*

Story of Revolution, achieved its purpose, though it’s been viewed more than 120 000 times on YouTube. Still, VanDyke insists he’s not a journalist, preferring to call the film “a revolutionary effort”.

During the month VanDyke spent in Syria, the battle of Aleppo was in full swing, and journalists were rushing in to cover the fight. James Foley was amongst them, and the two crossed paths several weeks before Foley was kidnapped in November 2012. Less than a year later, journalist Steven Sotloff, another friend of VanDyke’s, was also abducted in Syria. Then, in 2014, videos of Foley and Sotloff being beheaded by an ISIS fighter surfaced on the Internet in quick succession. VanDyke says a desire to avenge their deaths motivated him to do more than make a film.

In December 2014, several months after ISIS took Mosul and unleashed a campaign of terror in the Nineveh Plain region of northwest Iraq, VanDyke and three ex-U.S. soldiers moved into a small Assyrian village about 15 kilometres from ISIS-occupied territory. In short order, they established a training camp for the newly formed NPU, a Christian militia composed of volunteers from Iraq and abroad. VanDyke called the operation, as previously mentioned, Sons of Liberty International (SOLI). Infighting between VanDyke and his American colleagues eventually derailed the operation. But a few months later, VanDyke launched a publicity campaign to draw attention to his cause, appearing on the news. “We give people around the world an opportunity to have a tangible impact on fighting ISIS, rather than just retweeting something, or liking it on Facebook,” he told the *Christian Post* in April. And it worked. Soon, private donors in the U.S. started sending money (most were Christians, VanDyke says, eager to support their besieged fellow Christians), and U.S. military veterans started signing up to help train the militia and

even join the fight. He says he hired a company to vet applicants, to avoid recruiting psychopaths, and started making arrangements to procure body armour, radios, and Toyota Hilux trucks for the NPU. “We have the ability to take a platoon of 40 men, completely equip it, train it, pay its salaries, and provide everything else it needs for a year,” VanDyke said back in April. The NPU was conceived as a local defence militia, but VanDyke and the senior members of the NPU soon decided that they could help prepare it to go on the offensive, first to take back the Assyrian villages that had fallen to ISIS, and then to join the battle for Mosul.

THESE DAYS, VanDyke has two homes. One is a loft in east Harlem, a neighbourhood in the U.S.’ New York, which he shares with his girlfriend. The other is a five-bedroom apartment in Iraq’s Erbil, SOLI headquarters, where VanDyke spends long stretches of time alone. “I haven’t slept in weeks,” he says, wincing in the bright, Iraqi sun. It’s an oven-hot morning in May, and we’re standing on VanDyke’s balcony, which offers a panoramic view of Erbil, a confused landscape of newly and partially constructed residential skyscrapers, with names like “World Trade

Center,” rising awkwardly amidst blocks of modest, concrete homes, and domed mosques. To our left, we can see the backside of the Erbil International Airport, where about a dozen U.S. military helicopters sit in a perfect row. VanDyke says they’ve been flying more frequently these days. Since ISIS advanced through northern Iraq, Erbil has become the

VanDyke writes a press release for Sons of Liberty International. With Kojak, his trainer, on the ground, he has assumed a more administrative role in the operation.

region’s main staging ground for the counteroffensive. There’s a contingency of military trainers from several European countries training the peshmerga. Then there’s the unofficial reality, a Casablanca-like mix of factions, freelancers, journalists, and adventure seekers.

“Erbil reminds me of that bar in Star Wars, the one in Tatooine,” says Sean McFate, author of *The Modern Mercenary*, “It’s a strange jumping-off point for a lot of different people.” Recently, the U.S. government has pressured the peshmerga to prevent American citizens from joining its ranks (though a few occasionally slip in). That has done little to deter scores of Americans, mostly ex-soldiers and Marines, from making their way to the Kurdish front line, where a patchwork of paramilitary groups fighting alongside peshmerga forces are eager to put their skills and experience to use. Some groups actively recruit on Facebook; others pick up recruits in bars in the Christian quarter of Erbil, where foreigners hang out. A researcher who has interviewed dozens of American and British mercenaries in Iraq, and who asked not to be named, tells me many are on a quest for redemption. “They’re guys who feel guilty about things they did when they were deployed here years ago, or they believe that ISIS wouldn’t exist had they never invaded Iraq. Or they’re just running from something. This is a place where you can start over, or reinvent yourself.”

“I used to live over there,” Kojak tells me, pointing with a cigarette towards a plane hangar adjacent to the row of American helicopters, where, until a year ago, he was reportedly stationed as a security contractor making about R7 000 a day for a firm he refuses to identify. “It’s crazy being on this side of the fence without a sidearm.” Before that, he says, he was an army paratrooper, retiring after a robust, 20-year career that included a stint as an instructor, training and advising a local



SWAT team. Now, he's working for VanDyke pro bono. "I love the contracting work," he says, lighting a cigarette, his third since waking up an hour ago, "Hell, it put my daughter through school. But this means a lot more." When I ask him if his faith had anything to do with his decision to join SOLI, he holds up the silver cross that hangs from his neck, "Yeah, I'm a Christian. But I would train these guys regardless. After ISIS took Mosul, I guess I felt a bit of survivor's remorse." He tells me SOLI seemed like a more reasonable option than going straight to the front line. Maybe it is.

At one point, I travel to Makhmour, a ramshackle Kurdish village 50 kilometres north of Erbil, where a fierce, 3-day battle was waged during the ISIS offensive in northern Iraq last August, and where I meet Chris Smith, a 25-year-old ex-soldier, and the newest member of the peshmerga unit stationed there. With his blonde hair and sunny demeanour, Smith cuts a peculiar figure in a Kurdish uniform. It's his first day on the front line, and the peshmerga soldiers want to see him shoot an AK-47, which he does, unloading a full magazine of 7.62 over dry grass, towards a tiny row of trees where a contingency of ISIS fighters is apparently dug in. As far as I can tell, he passes the test.

Smith takes a deep breath when I ask him what he's doing here. "One of the things we value as Americans is freedom of religion, and ISIS is promoting its own brand of intolerance," he says, "I had a little military experience, so I just thought I was the man for the job." He tells me he deployed twice to Iraq as an infantryman with the U.S. Army, but never saw combat. When he decided to drop everything and return to Iraq, he had been working at a hotel. Later, as I'm leaving, he stops me. "Hey, does this mean I get a free copy of Maxim when the story comes out?" he asks. "Sure," I say, "Where do I send it?" He shrugs and grins widely, "I don't know."

AROUND NOON, we hop in a cab to Dohuk, a 2-hour drive northwest of Erbil. VanDyke wants to introduce Kojak to Behnam Aboosh Abelmasseh, commander of the NPU, so they can discuss plans for the upcoming training rotation. The focus of the training will be combat leadership, attended by a small group of would-be officers and sergeants. VanDyke plans to eventually fly over more trainers from the U.S., including experts in marksmanship, hand-to-hand combat, and first aid. But for now, Kojak will run the show. The meeting takes place on the edge of Dohuk, inside a compound that serves as housing for a few dozen Christian refugees who peer down at us through dusty windows as we approach. Abelmasseh and several of his advisers greet us in a room furnished with nothing but four fluffy couches.

Sporting a crisp, grey suit, the elderly, soft-spoken Abelmasseh has the air of a Mafioso. Before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, he says, he was an officer in the Iraqi Air Defence Force under Saddam (like many in the NPU, he hails from the Assyrian village of Qaraqosh, which fell to ISIS in June of last year). After formal introductions are made, VanDyke hands the floor over to Kojak, who snaps open his laptop and begins

"If we had half of what the other forces have, we would never retreat from this place."

showing Abelmasseh the PowerPoint presentations he says he used before. Abelmasseh's eyes light up, and he casts VanDyke an approving nod. "You've brought me a real trainer," he says, almost surprised.

Abelmasseh has just returned from Baghdad, where he's been working to secure permission for the NPU to exist. Without the Iraqi central government's blessing, the group, like the dozens of other militias operating unofficially in Iraq, runs the risk of being labelled a terrorist organisation. Past attempts by the Assyrians to stand up an army have been met with a

crushing backlash. "How long will this training take?" Abelmasseh asks. "How long do you want it to take?" Kojak replies respectfully. "No, I asked you a question," says the NPU commander, placing a finger inches from Kojak's chest, "Don't answer me with a question. Answer." Kojak says he'll need two weeks. Later, when I ask Abelmasseh why he wants his men trained by Americans, he tells me it's because nobody else in Iraq is capable of doing it. "The Iraqi Army and the peshmerga are trained by Americans," he says, "So, how can they train us?"

His goal now, he says, is to have the NPU fight alongside the Iraqi Army when it goes on the offensive in the Nineveh Plain and Mosul. The push, which was originally supposed to happen in April, will probably be one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war, and Abelmasseh knows it. He insists that Kojak teach his men the value of conserving ammo in a firefight. Bullets are expensive, and the NPU is desperate for funds. Every shot must count. The survival of the Assyrian people hinges on their ability to fight, and fight well. Or at least that's what the events of last August have led many of them to believe.

At the NPU outpost in Alqosh, an ancient Assyrian village situated at the base of a gently sloping mountain in the Nineveh Plain, I meet Athra Kado, a 25-year-old member of the all-volunteer unit stationed there. There's a peshmerga base in town as well, but Kado isn't the first Assyrian to tell me he doesn't trust them with his security. Early last August, he says, when ISIS tore through the region, the Kurdish forces fled in droves. Alqosh was spared, but now only about 24 kilometres of rolling grassland and the peshmerga line of defence are all that stand between it and ISIS.

From the roof of the NPU outpost, there's a clear view of the Plain, including the neighbouring village where Kado was taught the basics of soldiering by the Americans VanDyke recruited for the initial SOLI rotation. Kado used to be a teacher. Now, he wears an AK-47 slung across his chest, one of just a few in the NPU's slowly growing arsenal. "From that one month of training, I can tell you I'm about 30



VanDyke, 36, is one of just a handful of Westerners who live in Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan in northern Iraq. Despite the dangers, he intends to continue working in the region until ISIS is defeated.



Athra Kado, 25, stands guard on the Nineveh Plain. A self-taught English speaker, Kado was a schoolteacher before joining the NPU.

half of what the other forces have, we would never retreat from this place,” he says.

BY 1989, MOSES MOSHI, then a young sergeant in the Iraqi Army, had spent the better part of a decade fighting in the Iran-Iraq War. “I was tired of fighting,” he says, “So, when Saddam started with Kuwait, I ran.” We’re speaking on the lawn of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) headquarters in Dohuk, where Moshî and the 20 other NPU volunteers chosen for SOLI’s leadership course are about to receive their first lesson. “I took my wife and strapped my infant daughter to my back, and walked for seven days in the snow to Turkey.” The journey cost him four toes, and he takes off a boot to prove it. After 25 years living in Australia, Moshî returned home for the first time last September. Now, he wants to fight. “My mother and brother were in Mosul, and ISIS kicked them out. When I heard about the NPU, I told my wife and daughters I had to go.” Moshî is the sergeant major of the NPU. He tells me he’s one of eight Assyrian expats who’ve recently returned to join the

percent capable of fighting,” he says in English, “But I want to fight, and I want to make that percentage more.” That evening, on a hill where the NPU has placed a machine-gun position overlooking the road that leads to ISIS, Kado unsheathes his knife and starts playfully jabbing it in the air. “If we had

militia. Today is the first day of training, and the students, each having been issued an AK-47 and a notebook, appear eager to prove their mettle. Kojak, in uniform, introduces himself in the steely tone he honed over many years as an army NCO. “It’s an honour to be here,” he says, pausing for the translator, “I heard about what you guys were doing here, and I was inspired.” On the projector screen behind him, there’s a photograph of American soldiers on patrol in Iraq, superimposed with Arabic script. Not wasting any time, Kojak jumps into the first lesson. I’m immediately reminded of the early days of my own enlistment. Everything, the slide shows, the terminology, the way Kojak holds his hands behind his back when he speaks, is straight out of the U.S. Army handbook, literally. VanDyke stands rigidly at the back of the classroom, quietly surveying the scene.

The following afternoon, VanDyke hands each of the trainees a pair of goggles and an airsoft rifle for a lesson on squad-level tactics. The trainees are broken into two teams. One is assigned the role of liberator, while the other vanishes into the compound to play ISIS. After a quick briefing, the home team locks and loads and rushes into the fray, shooting frantically as pellets zip overhead. Kojak, cigarette in hand, jogs alongside his pupils shouting pointers,

“You guys need to be communicating more! Move, move, move!” Realising that the enemy fire is coming from above, the team funnels into the headquarters building, and begins pouncing from room to room en route to the staircase. On the roof, the final skirmish is quick and decisive. When the dust settles, ISIS is defeated, but spirits are high on

both sides of the fight. From behind a satellite dish, a lone gunman emerges and peels off his goggles. It's VanDyke, blood trickling from pellet wounds down his hawkish face.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO PREDICT how all of this will play out. "There aren't enough Christians in Iraq, and they don't have enough arms to take on a group like ISIS," says McFate, "And if, somehow, the NPU did become a crack assault force, I think the peshmerga would view them as a threat. So, best-case scenario, the NPU isn't taken seriously, they have almost zero effect, and VanDyke doesn't get his head cut off on YouTube."

The battle to reclaim Mosul is widely expected to begin soon, and VanDyke vows to be there. There are obstacles, primarily involving other organisations competing for influence in northern Iraq. Right now, VanDyke's biggest adversary is a political action committee called the American Mesopotamian Organisation (AMO), "founded to influence and guide U.S. policy on matters of interest to the Assyrian American community". The AMO is the chief supplier of funds to the NPU, and it is campaigning to sever SOLI's involvement with the group.

"Matthew VanDyke is a fraud," insists Jeff Gardner, director of communications and media at Restore Nineveh Now, a subsidiary of AMO, "He represents himself as a combat veteran, but he's never served in any recognised service anywhere, and hanging out with Libyan rebels doesn't count." Gardner continues, "He misrepresents the narrative. This is not a Christian army that will storm into cities like Mosul. It's not even an army. It's a protection unit. Its main function will be keeping the peace in places that have been liberated, so people will go back home. Look, we have a major refugee crisis on our hands."

In late May, halfway through the training session, ADM officials informed VanDyke that SOLI would no longer be allowed to conduct training at its headquarters building. "AMO pressured them into doing it," says a frustrated VanDyke on the phone from Erbil. He's making certificates for the abridged version of what was supposed to be a 2-week course. "I've never seen the NPU so angry. They needed more training. But AMO doesn't care about training, and it's going to get people killed." It was a heavy blow, but not an unexpected one. Over the past few months, tensions between VanDyke and Gardner have been growing, with the NPU caught in the middle.

VanDyke tells me he's looking for a new training facility, and that when he finds it, he and Kojak will train the entire NPU force full-time, five days a week. He has also been meeting with other armed Assyrian groups, just in case the NPU gets cold feet. "If they decide not to be an offensive force, we'll identify another militia who will," he says, his voice resolute,

"Look, the primary mission is to have a tangible impact in the fight against ISIS."

At that moment, I realise VanDyke is all-in, that when the gates of Mosul are flung wide open, that's where he'll go, and Hell will be waiting. I recall a conversation we had one night in Iraq. We were driving into Dohuk, and it was raining so hard I nearly jumped out of the taxi to get to higher ground. It felt like a good time to ask VanDyke if he ever thought it was a mistake, this life he's chosen. "Sometimes I question if it was a wise decision," he said, "But once you become aware of the brutality of the modern world, there's no plugging back into the matrix. There's no un-ringing that bell." Then, after a long pause, he added, "I'm fully committed to the cause. I'll do whatever it takes." ■



Right: Airsoft rifles in the SOLI classroom.
Below: Kojak gives a lesson on door-breaching.



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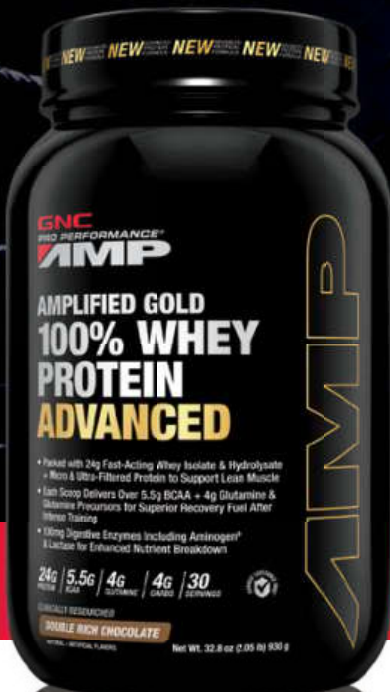
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